THE DEFENDANT SOUL

CHARLES FORREST

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Mrs T. B. Byrd
Christmas 1932

THE DEFENDANT SOUL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Stolen Horse. A play in four acts.
All Fools Together. A bucolic history.
Three One-act Plays.

The
DEFENDANT SOUL

By

Charles Forrest

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THE DEFENDANT SOUL

CHAPTER I

The last stroke of the clock caught her ear. She turned reluctantly in her chair and looked at the dial, telling herself it could not be one o'clock. It was three. She had come in from Bournebridge just before twelve. Allowing for her dinner-time, she had wasted more than two hours in front of the fire, and wasted them to make her brain as thin and worn as an old handkerchief.

She had not been haunted by any picture of her crime. She knew how to deal with the direct assaults of self-accusation. But her mind had taken an unforeseen turn. The force had gone out of her brain and it had been flooded by a new and paralysing kind of thought. It was not like a passing despair, such as came to everybody. It was more wholesale and more deeply rooted. Everything she had done since she was five years old and able to do anything at all was silly, stupid, vainglorious and laughable. She smothered her own past with jeers and then writhed under the contempt she heaped upon herself.

It was no use saying to herself that she was mad to torture herself like that. Her spirit was too sick to take any medicine.

Feebly, self-indulgently, she began to complain that she had been strung up all her life; over-

burdened all the sixteen years with George Cole. And the final struggle of a month ago was enough in itself to account for this collapse of all her senses.

She recoiled painfully and gradually from such an admission and from such a justification of her feebleness. Presently she stood up as if to escape from the poor and wretched spirit that had come to inhabit her body. She stared about the room with foolish but rebellious eyes. The brownish-grey cat —Arabella would never have a black cat because of its unhealthy suggestion—was asleep in the window in the springtime sun. She moved to it, marvelling in her bewildered state how it was that cats knew so well what was good for them.

The sunlight on her own face told her that her lips were pressed together as if she were in a spasm and that the skin round her eyes was as drawn up as a string bag. Yet the light soothed her as she stood and gave her a new point of view. The house had been too quiet, day and night, since George was taken away—and the barn and field and orchard as well. She had been thrown on herself after sixteen years of George's company, and you got out of the way of being enough for yourself during that time. And she had tried to carry too much; she had not understood she would have to guard against weakness in herself as well as mislead the outside world. The truth was plain now—she was in more danger from herself than from anybody. By some means or other she must win back her

old confidence in herself, believe once more that her past labours had been sensible, wholesome and praiseworthy. If she did not regain this faith, she would go mad and end herself in the pond. She knew she would.

She must go and talk to Maria Porby. Maria was her best friend, her only real friend. Maria had one son a butler, another in the Salvation Army in regular employ, another a public-house keeper in London. And Maria's mind was like her family; all the differences could find their place in it. And if Maria liked to air her own opinions, she never trampled on the need that lay behind another person's opinions.

Arabella's cottage was at the end of three others and the biggest. Queen Anne's Bounty had been the landlord for years and had built this end cottage for George Cole's grandfather or for anybody who liked to hire it and the parcel of land. All the cottages had vegetable gardens in front across the roadway that ended in the Coles' yard. A gate between the Coles' cottage and Mrs. Board's next door kept the livestock within bounds, and the noise of it told Mrs. Board whenever anyone came in or out of the Coles' place.

Almost the instant that Arabella Cole tapped on Maria Porby's door, Mrs. Board poked her head round her door-jamb: "Didn't she tell you, Mrs. Cole? Maria's gone down to the school-house."

Arabella knew the woman was waiting to see whether she stiffened at the mention of the school-

house. So she stared straight at Edie Board as much as to say that Edie could see whatever she pleased. Then she realized her eyes were burning with the pain of her spirit, and looked downwards and said in a new access of dullness: "No. Maria did not say she would be out. Or I should not have come a journey."

"Twenty yards! Not a long journey, Arabella," Mrs. Board whickered and came out of her doorway. She had sensed her neighbor's weakened condition in a moment and meant to gossip until Arabella let her into the inside of things for a change. "Mrs. Beales is still suffering from the shock. The effects of sudden death do last a long time. And Maria said she would take some of her quince jelly and sit by her. Poor old dame! Mrs. Beales would be glad to have a daughter to talk to at this crisis, I lay you."

"I dare say." Arabella stepped towards home, thinking monotonously to herself that Edie Board had found another word to work to death. 'Crisis': straight out of the *News of the World*.

"Are you going down to the Court to give evidence, Mrs. Cole?" Edie tried to stop her neighbour's retreat, and to do so brought out her best question of all anyhow.

Arabella's heart began to labour at this prying. For it was nothing but prying. Edie Board's nature had settled that George was guilty as soft old Susanna Davy at the far-end cottage had settled that George was a nice man and innocent. Or was

it more than empty prying? Had Edie added a suspicion of her neighbour's wife to her conviction of her neighbour's guilt? Such a jump was not outside Edie's habit of mind. Sixteen years ago she had congratulated Arabella on a lively bridal night and grinned as much as to say she had been listening at the wall between their cottages. But the party wall had been an end wall at one time and was about three feet in thickness all the way up and must have prevented Edie from hearing anything.

Yet in this moment of fear Arabella started to break down the barrier of caution she had set up between Edie and herself. Maria Porby was out. That disappointment seemed to double her need to talk to someone, no matter what their nature. So she babbled aimlessly that the case might come to anything in the Assize Court, but it was bad for George and herself and there would never be any savour again though all turned to good.

Edie's eyes brightened like a thirsty man's when he starts on his first pint of beer. At the sight of that gleam, Arabella gulped and took hold of herself and said in a hard, dry voice, careless of what had gone before: "I shall give evidence if the lawyers say I must, Edie."

"Oh!" Edie was experienced enough not to retort that the lawyers must have said one way or the other long ago. She must wait until Arabella lost control of herself again. To fill in the time, she began to talk about quinces. Maria Porby's quince

jam might be a wonder, but she herself would not give garden-room to a quince tree. For one thing, you never got what might be called a crop. And when you did get it,—it wasn't that she was jealous of Maria's making: she could make it good enough herself—but what could you do with quinces like you could with apples, or even pears? Mrs. Board was apparently wound up to go on about quinces for ever, but she observed that her neighbour was listening with a glad ease of mind and suddenly sank her voice to ask secretively: "Do you really want to get your husband off, Arabella?"

But Arabella had touched the bottom of her misery when she turned away from Maria Porby's unopening door and she was ready for Edie's thrust. She changed her face and seemed to think hard and deep: "George is like the rest of us, my dear. If he has done a wicked thing, he must answer to justice."

"You're right." Edie gave Arabella's solemn words about justice their solemn due, but inwardly she was raging because Arabella still had control of herself. Yet she tried another stroke, most neighbourly loyal in manner: "If I was in your case, Arabella, I should want to see him hung."

Arabella stood as grave as a judge and as far above all personal revenge: "There's two sides to everything, Edie."

"Ah, that's what I always say myself. I lay the wench was just as much to blame as your George."

Edie changed to the second side as quick as lightning.

"If George is hung"—Arabella corrected her neighbour's short-sighted views about guilt and punishment with a kindly air—"I shall be the same as I am now for always. Have all his work to do as well as my own." She stepped unhindered to the gate, because Mrs. Board had nothing to say to that unexpected and simple reason for disappointing the hangman. And while Arabella was closing the gate carefully on account of the chickens, Edie was still staring dumbly at her, half-fascinated and half-repelled by her mastery of all the sensations that a murderer's wife must experience. And to be so near to a break-down and to be so far from it, all inside five minutes, was really inhuman.

"I'll tell Maria you stepped round and missed her." Edie had to say something. And she jeered in her jealousy and disdain of the confidences that would be Maria's.

"Thank you very much, Edie," said Arabella. Her gratitude was sincere. The talk with Edie had shown that her courage and her ability to look after herself were not dead, but only weary. And at the same time it was satisfying to feel that Edie Board was all of a white fury inside because she had been kept her distance and hopelessly beaten out of a prying gossip in spite of all her craft and in spite of the darkest mood that Arabella had ever known in her life.

CHAPTER II

Maria would not be back till it was time to get her husband's tea; Arabella knew Maria. She would let Mrs. Beales talk her heart out and never say one word too much. The school-house was lonely and, as Edie Board had mentioned, the widow Beales had no grown-up man or daughter to talk to: only half-ripe sons. Mrs. Harris, the head-mistress, kept her in her place as housekeeper, and only allowed her into the front rooms for cleaning and at meal-times. Mrs. Harris had not been much of an angel to Cissie Rouse either—but that did not matter just at present.

Perhaps Maria would look in during the evening. Meanwhile, God be thanked, there was plenty of work to be done, and, Edie Board be thanked, she had the heart for it once again. So thinking, Arabella tied a spotted handkerchief over her head and tucked her black hair underneath. As she looked in the glass, she considered her eyes. Had Edie Board seen too much in them? No; they were black and big-lidded, and when you got the full look of them they were neither crafty nor wise; just hot and obstinate. They had baffled Edie Board and police inspectors, and they would go on baffling them.

She collected soil and leaf-mould, wood-ash and

lime and mixed and sieved in the shed. She did not mind if the work of thirty-odd years sent her back over the straight path she had travelled since childhood. She did not mind anything now she was busy. She had not been a fool all her days. Father used to say she had better fingers than himself for planting out seedlings. And Father was not lavish with his praise; he was Scotch.

Father never said, nor did Mother, what part of Scotland he came from. No doubt he had a few rows before he left. But a man, one of the big merchants in Bournebridge, once stopped him in the street while she was on the cart and said: "Aweel, Androo Fleming! This is no Edinbro'!" The man and Father had a long chat and that was how she came to know Dad had learned his trade in Edinburgh, or just outside it.

Mother was not Scotch. She was a maid in a nobleman's house when Dad married her, and she used to think how comic it was that Dad and Mother liked each other and yet thought each other the last word in stupidity. She had found out since it was more comic than she had imagined. Mother had been very pretty and said Father had written verses to her, but she had mislaid them in shifting about. Mother had called her Arabella, but she took after her father and Father's people. She was taller than Father. None of her brothers stopped at home. It wasn't that Father was cruel; he never hit anyone unless he was put out. But he was often

put out, because he could not bear to be contradicted.

Mother said that was why he lost all his jobs. The noblemen's agents and stewards could put up with him going off on a spree two or three times a year, but they drew the line at being told off by the gardener as if they were dirt under his feet.

She had a real experience of Father's temper when she was sixteen. She never went out to service on account of her skill, but stopped at home and helped him. One wet day Father said some plants in the greenhouse were getting pot-bound and she must go and bring them into the shed. She did not want to go messing about in the pouring rain and it was no use asking him to wait until it had left off pouring. So she said the plants were not pot-bound. He said he was not to be contradicted and she said he would be. It had been a trying day, and very soon Father had called her a 'besom' and she had said she wasn't and had flung the pot in her hand at him. It was a good thing for her the table was between them. He flung something back at her as quick as lightning, and she would have gone on flinging and dodging till further notice if she had not seen black murder come into his eye. She made for the door. How ever she managed to keep ahead until she was in their neighbour's kitchen she did not know to this day. It still made her warm to think of her escape.

Mother came round for her in about ten minutes and said Father was all right again. She didn't

quite believe it, but he was. He did not say so, but she could see he was sorry for his part in the flare-up. He lectured her and declared she was a woman now and must have subtlety in dealing with a man. If she gave way to provocation like a man, her temper would cost her just as much as it had cost him. There was something in his voice that told her he had lost more than jobs through his temper.

Mother scolded her afterwards because she had forgotten Father was almost due for one of his sprees and bound to be savage. And sure enough, Bank Holiday came the next week and Dad was not to be seen for four days. When he came back, one eye was bunged up and his mouth was on the slant. There were some very queer houses down by the river at Bournebridge. She had to do the round of the houses while he was away and until his face was presentable. Father never sold wholesale; he built up a private trade and scorned the middlemen.

This was the time when she first began to understand the curious nature of man. Father must have seen she was beginning to have sense and liked it, because he made her come with him on the cart whenever he went to Bournebridge, though it was a great waste of her time. Naturally, at sixteen, she had only the glimmering of understanding, and really more of a fellow-feeling than understanding. But anyhow, twelve years later she could manage Father better than Mother could. And she had

need, because Father fell to pieces fast for such a wiry man and his troubles made him very crotchety.

He did his best to spoil her chances with George. And, parenthetically, Arabella defied herself to say she would have been happier if her chances had been wholly spoiled.

On the first showing, Dad had every reason to dislike George. He had been calling at one house in Quorle Road for fifteen years when the cook said one day they would not want any more vegetables or eggs, though they could do with some cut flowers occasionally. Father said it was real pleasing to hear that after all these years. Of course, neither the cook nor any of the servants had had the wit to speak up for Father's age and troubles with the lady of the house; wenches that live on other people's victuals soon lose their common sense. So the cook said haughtily that the gentleman now waiting on them was a religious acquaintance of the family and Fleming must take it as final.

Arabella could still see her father coming out of the gate of that house, flare-eyed with disgust: "Gentle . . . man! Gentle . . . man! Did ye ever hear such blether as these English use? Waited upo' b' a gentle . . . man; a religious acquaintance of the family. God save us!"

Dad went quiet after he had been scornful about the English; that always relieved him. And presently he said he was going to 'skelp' that same gentleman. She warned him it was no use fighting

and they would only lose all their trade at the house. But Father answered they would lose all their trade in any case; these Chapel people hung closer together than Jews, but without the saving common sense of the Jew.

Dad had a long talk with his baker friend at the bottom of Quorle Road and learned that his rival was not a Chapeller at all, not properly. The son of old Benjy Cole could not be a Chapeller.

She asked Dad and the old baker why not? Chapellers had to come from somewhere. She asked, though she knew the two men were prejudiced. They wanted to think Benjy Cole's son was not honest, so they argued to what they wanted to think.

The old baker said Benjy Cole had always worked the river side of Bournebridge and left the high swell end of the town to first-class growers like her father. Haggling for ha'pence in the back streets had been the breath of life to old Benjy. He stuck his greens in the bottom of his splay-wheeled cart and his chickens and his rabbits on top of his greens and his eggs on top of everything. And if a little blood drained out of the dead rabbits on to the greens, Benjy did not mind, nor did his customers. And Benjy worried as little about the condition of his soul as he did about the condition of his cart.

Arabella declared he must be a dirty old man, and that was every reason why the son should be different. The baker said she was a young innocent,

though she was twenty-eight. Old Benjy had rheumatic fever and his son, George Cole, had taken over everything. And George had varnished the cart and varnished his soul, both at the same time. And George had had the splay wheels straightened and had taken to the straight paths himself—the straight paths that led to the swell end of Bournebridge and the bread in the mouth of her father.

She could not side with a hypocrite. She was as wild as her father when she waited with him at the Arboretum Corner of Quorle Road one morning at about half-past nine. There was only one house with a big garden on the opposite side, and the husbands had gone off to business and the ladies had not yet come out to do their shopping. So the street was as empty as the grave, and Father had just said they must not be too innocent if it came to the police court when he broke off to spit out the words, "That's the one!" and to climb down from his seat.

She did not know to this day what made her change her mind before ever she saw George face to face. Perhaps it was the sight of a solitary young man; perhaps it was her fear that Dad might not be able to skelp the oncomer. Anyway, she pointed out at once: "He isn't in much of a way, Dad. He's only got a two-wheeled cart." Dad had a four-wheeled light lorry on his full days.

"And just as soon as he has taken my customers, he'll have a four-wheel." Dad glared up at her for talking nonsense and then called across the road

like a dog with a stiff neck: "A word with ye, ma friend."

"Granted, I'm sure." The young man pulled up in a little surprise, but spoke quite politely. She thought he was all her own age, twenty-nine or thirty. But she found out afterwards he was only four-and-twenty.

"Will ye step down?" Father asked next and sharply. He did not like talking to anyone sitting above his head.

The young man began to undouble himself and stood up the best of six feet.

"Cooh!" She laughed outright, for all her father turned and glared at her again. "Haven't you took on a midget, my dear?" And she was noticing that George had a patch on the knees of his cloth breeches sewn on skew-wise with coarse stitches. It looked as if his wife or mother had poor sight.

Then Dad said: "He has nae real stomach. He's no a Presbyterian: just an excited Wesleyan." And Dad stuck his lip out and asked, as if George were dirt beneath his feet: "Ye're the son of Benjamin Cole, eh?"

George had not much stomach at twenty-four, as Dad said. He stooped. But she could see at once he had the makings of a kingly-looking fellow if he were looked after—what with his straight nose and his big, well-shaped eyes. She was never afraid to say a common man could look like a king; kings came from common men in the old days, and they

would again. And that was the sort of men she liked.

George had looked at her before he answered he was Ben Cole's boy, and she noticed how he cocked his head as if struck by her bearing.

"Ben Cole's boy?" Father had the Scotch knack of making any words sound like a jeer. "Heh! The son of Benjamin Cole conceives it possible to be a disciple of John Wesley? Eh, ye're either an ignoramus or a rascal." She could still hear Dad chewing out the words and tacking on his final idea: "And I'm thinking you're the rascal."

"I've found grace," George answered back proudly.

"Aye?" Father's ideas raced round George anew. "So! So!" He kept on muttering for all the world like a dog that is working itself up to the fight. George looked puzzled at Dad and then puzzled and half-grinning at her. Then Father growled again: "You're just young. And must be treated for sic an awful calamity." He took his coat off with ever so much care. And advised George: "Take your coatie off, my mannie. And learn that grace is of mair painful acquisition than ye imagine. And for-bye, doesna give ye the right to my customers." And then Father jumped up and hit George on the nose, just hard enough to show business was meant.

George went as red as a carrot and started growling too. At that time she did not understand why her father had such an objection to Chapel

people. So she felt George was mostly in the right when he said Father was going on like a fool and the police court would only damage both of them with the best people in the town. And if Father was so keen on trade he could go down by the river and pick up the dirty little customers that he, George, had dropped.

Father said he was much obliged, and hopped round George with a real battle light in his eye and loud taunts on his lips.

"You be ashamed of yourself, you cocky old man," George burst out as he stood with his hands close to his legs.

"I believe the man's a passive resister," Dad said to her in awful disappointment. "I'm thinking I must give him something to cure it." And he was just going to give George another slap when George drew himself up:

"I'm not afraid of you, Mister. And I'm no passive resister when it's a question of fighting the devil. But I've a crippled father and mother at home,"—he did not say anything about a wife—"I've them to keep. And I'm going to keep them, Mister. I can't do business like my father. I must have a clean cart and a fixed price. And that's why I've come up to this end of the town."

"Aye?" Father sounded very doubtful, but George's tale had got hold of him. He could see George was honest and hadn't a bit of the rough-and-ready dealer about him. And then she leaned over the back of her seat and to fetch up a bunch

of flowers and to fling them straight into George's face. "Have a look at that lot, Mister," she called to him.

George caught the bunch of carnations and smiled at her.

"And what in the name of Heaven are ye at?" Dad blazed out at her.

But she was enjoying herself. "If Mr. Cole can grow carnations, he can pay us back," she answered, full of cheek.

"No." George shook his head very sadly. "We were always more dealers than gardeners, us Coles. And I wasn't born with the fingers or the brains to grow anything special."

"There you are, Dad," she called out triumphantly, though Father had put on a self-satisfied look before she spoke. "Mr. Cole can never cut us out."

"Aweel, George Cole,"—Dad might have owned all Quorle Road by the way he knuckled his moustache and summed George up—"if ye've a father and mother unable to work, we'll say no more."

"I shan't poach, Mister." George was very eager to be friendly. "But I must go where my friends ask me."

Father climbed up to the cart seat again, and she smiled over his head at George and laughed out when George promised to repay the carnations some day. When Father and she were down the road she said the young man looked as though he

had not had a square meal for weeks, and it was a wonder he durst go to smart houses in such old clothes.

She had an idea that would start Dad off and make him forget she had been too friendly towards George. And it did. "Starvation!"—Dad's voice rolled in her ears to this day—"Starvation in one form or another is an indispensable condition of human existence. . . ."

"Oh, go on, Dad!" She was angry then; much as she had wanted to provoke him to talk. He had such a cruel way of talking and seemed so satisfied with the cruelty.

He did not take any notice of her protest; he had learnt the truth of his words. "The race that cannot starve is the race that perishes. The individual that has not starved can never reach his maximum." Dad was on his mountain-tops when he had said that. "Aye," he wound up, "Nature knows as well as me. And I've no pity for the gaunt lad: just envy."

"Then why'd you let him have a share of your trade without skelping him, as you promised?" She thought she had him there.

But he said at once: "Because of his old folk. There's no point in starving them whose forces are gone." Then he looked sideways at her and seemed to remember what she had been up to, because he reflected out loud that he was sorry he had not beaten the young man, just to warn him to keep his proper distance.

CHAPTER III

Arabella rested a while with her hands on the edge of her box of mould and stared out of the window of the shed on to the faint new green of the orchard fence. She soon found out she must not stay to ask herself whether she had been too forward or whether she would have been wiser never to have thrown those carnations. Doubting idleness brought back the sick sorrow of the dinner-time. So long as her hands were busy and so long as her memories drifted through her mind like white clouds through a blue sky, all was comforting and comfortable; outside her feeling-self as a cloud was outside; far away like a cloud and without interior hurt.

If her face twitched as she recalled George at the road-gate of their cottage the Sunday after the chat in Quorle Road, it took on a smile as soon as she remembered how hot and dusty and red he looked.

He had got it bad. His pony had to have a day's rest and he had not the money for a bicycle, so he had walked the ten miles from Dodnash through Bournebridge to Nowton All Saints, where she lived. He had set off as soon as Chapel was finished and was fumbling at their gate,—Father

would never have the fastening seen to—at a quarter-past three.

She was not allowed to go on like other young women, but had to take off her smart Sunday clothes the minute she came back from Church. But she went straight out to help George with the gate. He did not concern himself with her dress, but looked into her face and took a deep breath.

Father and Mother were having their nap, so she took her young man round the sheds and the frames. He said that was what he had come for. But he was like a man in a fever as soon as he was out of sight of everybody. He cried out he had told her a lie and he had come for her promise to marry him. She laughed out loud, but she was pleased he was so silly. Of course she was just as bad; just as eager. Only she had more sense. And she knew by instinct a man would feel he had been rushed if a woman let him go too far all at once.

She had not had any practice in handling a love-maker. She had never gone off into the lanes with a boy like other girls. She had said impudent things to men when they had said impudent things to her, but that was mostly ignorant noise. She had sometimes wished that Father had not brought her up so stand-offish, but Father could not help it. He had always looked on the English as so many cattle. Even the best of them had no fundamental vision or only a mistaken one. So Dad did not mix with his neighbours, and discouraged Mother from it, and pretty well trained his daughter into old-

maidishness before her time. That was one reason why she almost worshipped George from the start and set herself to be sensible; she wanted to do everything for the man who had had the boldness to break into her prison and deliver her.

Then George was a cut above the hobbledehoys of the village and some of the farmers' sons. He had the Chapel way of speaking, but he read books whenever he had the chance, and sometimes spoke at the week-night meetings. He said a lot of the old men in Dodnash were as ignorant as clods and used to talk about Jesus and His disciples eating potatoes, and were very wrathful when he contradicted. But there were a lot more young men in the parish who thought as he did and were not going to be domineered by ignorant old men any more.

Mother liked George. He had sense enough to listen properly when she started her long stories all over again as soon as she had finished them. Father used to tell the same stories, but on different days. If Mother liked a story she had remembered, she had to tell it again immediately to taste the enjoyment a second time.

When she got in that night, Father said there was something tinny about George. She told him there never was any satisfying a Scotsman and never would be. But George had dropped the brick on Father's corn at tea-time. Father must have seen George was after her, but he must needs be funny and ask if George had come to spy how to

steal his trade away from him. Of course George was sheepish and woundup and confident and he burst out that was exactly what he had come for —to steal Father's trade. Father's daughter would teach him how to grow roses and carnations and early greenstuff, all the tricks of the trade. And Mr. and Mrs. George Cole would sweep the old fellows out of the swell end of Bournebridge.

Father gasped before he knew it. He didn't like being made to gasp, so he laughed sarcastically and said it was as well to know the future in good time. But he was really cast down, because George's words made him realize his daughter had been a great help to him and he was not so nimble and clear-headed any more. He never took to George after that.

George apologized to her for saying too much, when she walked part of the way home with him. But she said he was not to know their family concerns and Father had been sarcastic first. Then George wanted to draw her into the hedge and begin love-making again, but she said he had a ten-mile walk, and if he did not worry though he had to be up early, she did. Besides, she liked stepping alongside him and to feel love playing between them like summer lightning. George said he had never seen anyone walk like her; she moved like a thoroughbred. "Thorough bred to work," she answered him and they laughed a lot over that bit of back-chat.

George came over every Sunday, wet or fine,

and though Father would not alter the delivery round they managed to see each other during the week. She went to see George's people and they liked her, up to a point. Mr. Cole was confined to his chair. He had no teeth and stabbing eyes and a face as wrinkled as an old walnut. He suffered a lot with his complaint, but he did not grumble, and set himself to be kind to her. When he heard she knew all about garden work he said there ought to be enough to fill four mouths, otherwise he would not have heard of George's getting married. Prices were picking up, but other things were against them. When she asked what, he said rheumatics were, for one thing.

George's mother was just like the old lady on Horniman's Tea, only not quite so comfortable and sure. She showed her the room she would have when she and George were married. And then the old lady kissed her and said she would be about right for George. He was more like her people than Mr. Cole's and had the sort of mind that made trouble for itself. The Coles did not grieve as long as they had a full belly once a week and a bit of a lark once in a while. But her people—oh dear!

Arabella could see the old lady was pleased about her family's weakness, and when she put in a pleasant word to say that Mrs. Cole's people had the brains, the old lady agreed very brightly. Then she shook a solemn head and declared with a sigh: "But they must have excitement. I don't say anything against Chapel; good and bad go

there like everywhere else. But George turned Chapel, not because he was a sinner, but because there was more excitement for him than at Church."

Arabella sympathized with George's preference, but asked cautiously: "It doesn't affect his brain? Being Chapel?"

"No. Certainly not." Mrs. Cole took the question as a personal insult. "My son has got a very strong brain. My family always had." And then she quietened. "What I mean to say, my dear, is this. When you're married you must see George's brain don't jump about too much."

She could not get anything more exact out of Mrs. Cole, and she herself was feeling she would risk anything to be with George. So they were married four months after they had met in Quorle Road, and here in this house and round these sheds she had found the most of heaven she would ever find in her life. They might both have been a bit clumsy at the start and as reckless as a couple of birds in a bush. But it was the time of times. There was a flame in each of them, and when these two flames met, the one flame soared sky-high.

CHAPTER IV

She barrowed the boxes of earth and seedlings to the scullery door and lifted them within. There was work enough to keep her busy till bedtime, even if Maria did not come round. She was used to fourteen or sixteen hours a day and she must keep it up if she was to sleep and have her health. She wanted no more nightmare and weeping. Meanwhile it was only a quarter to five and she could not sit still over a cup of tea; she would go out and clean the field till dark and then have a good supper.

When she had fed the pigs and the fowls and closed the frames against the afternoon chill—for a thin spread of cloud had come up over the sun—she took her fork.

She was well away from the world in the field. Straight to the south, across Mr. Tanpodder's fields, the red gable of the school-house poked up between the fir-trees on the near side of the school road. Cissie Rouse would never teach the infants there any more.

But she had not come out to think of that yellow-haired hussy. She had dealt with her, as she would deal with everybody like her till she died.

Arabella forked and beat the reluctant soil, but the sight of the school-house had raised a riot of

rebellion in her mind, and presently she had straightened her back and was staring round with eyes blurred by the unshed tears of helplessness. There was not much to choose between human life and a rabbit's life. Both got snared—in wire snares. And in Dodnash, too, the quietest parish in the county.

She always accounted for the quietness of Dodnash by that marsh made by the river overflow to the south of Bournebridge. That had flung the roads to London east through Fordunhoo and west through Tokenhall. Of course the railway struck through the marsh and came to Dodnash, but you could not hear the trains unless the wind was right and blowing for rain. Very few trains stopped. The stationmaster and the station people did not count for much in the parish and had no reason to count. Their minds were on London and the places their trains went to and not on anything that belonged to the land.

But there, far beyond the green feathery shoots of the trimmed hedge, was the square tower of the church that had not been enough for George. And behind the church was the wooded hill of Dodnash Hall, the home of the leader of the Chapel that had been too much for George. The merchant from Bournebridge who lived at the Park to the west of the church was good for nothing, except to smile at the boys when they touched their caps to him. But Dodnash boys would not do that much longer, unless they got level politeness back again.

Folks were learning to stand on their own feet. As she had taught George.

She and George had made this field into a market garden. It was a cornfield when she first came to Dodnash, and well she remembered how they had played the fool with her over it. She had not been married two days before she declared the garden in the front and the wired-in cabbage patch did not give her enough scope. But old man Cole, though he had been glad to hear she was a first-class gardener and able to earn a living for everybody, ruled she was to leave things as they were. She did. She had more sense than hunt for trouble.

But such a nonsensical idea was bound to cause trouble. George came home one November evening and handed back a sovereign to his father, saying that Mr. Tanpodder did not want any pay for ploughing and sowing their field. He was pleased to oblige a neighbour.

Mr. Cole nodded, and pocketed the money as if he had expected it back. But she herself was vexed at this dependence on Mr. Tanpodder and said so to George then and there. George answered that if Mr. Tanpodder had taken the pound they would have had to go short of the money's worth of victuals during the winter. His varnished cart was not bringing in as much as his father's dirty splay-wheeled one.

"O' course it isn't," she cried at him. "You've got nothing to put in your varnished cart. But

you'd have to buy a lorry if you let me alter the field."

George began to look more alive, and old Mother Cole gaped. But Mr. Cole took his short clay pipe out of his mouth and smiled as if she were a little girl: "Tha's all right, my dear. I've told you what's to be done with the field."

"Leave it as it is. That's what is to be done with it." She flung that at the old man. "And you'll sit there and suck at your empty pipe and eat bread and scrape and watch your family eat bread and scrape like good little lambs. But your dear old field must be as it is: crammed o' thistles and spear grass."

The old man turned away his head as if he had not heard. And George and his mother made her feel she had said too much. She was still a stranger in the house after three months.

"Of course I've said too much." It was George's look that made her flare out; he ought to have been siding with her. "Who wouldn't say too much? I married you for better or worse, but not to be a brain-idle beggar and the wife of a brain-idle beggar. You know the sort of trade you can do. You know I can help you to that trade. But you'd sooner make a mock of me and yourself and cup your hands to catch Tanpodder's charity." But it was no use scolding George when he was backing up his father; it only made him feel miserable. He was almost too fond of the old man.

"You said the field was all spear grass . . ."

George excused himself by protesting against her exaggeration.

She had not meant to say any more, but she had to take advantage of George's uneasiness. "Oh, I know it isn't. There is more than spear grass. You get about three sacks of oats off four acres. And it ought to be full of paying things—vegetables, apple-trees, rose-bushes, strawberries . . ." But George's face soon fell. He knew nothing of the finer side of gardening, so his mind could not light up at her words.

The old people settled themselves, satisfied they were too much for her. But she was young and earnest in those days and she felt responsible for the success of her new married life. And when she had herself in hand she prayed old man Cole to tell her what was wrong with her idea. He was so scared by her pluck in tackling him again that almost before he knew what he was saying he had told her she could do what she liked in the orchard. But she was to leave his field alone; it was his field.

"But whoever heard of growing anything in an orchard? Such great old overgrown trees too." She was going to garden as her Dad had done or not at all.

"It's my field." That was the old man's song. But presently he was kinder or else he was at last persuaded her spirit must have a decent answer. He put the question to her: "Where is our corn and straw for the pony and the chickens coming from, if we don't have the field as it is?"

"Buy your corn and straw," she said outright.

They all smiled at her. They lived by not buying anything. She had made herself ridiculous. Then Mr. Cole finished up by saying they had kept going with the field as it was and they would keep going again when George had unlearnt his smart ways and taken to dealing like his father and his grandfather before him.

That showed her the old man was more ridiculous than she was. George had no dealing in him. But she said nothing till she had George to herself upstairs. The old people slept in the front room downstairs on account of the old man's crippled state. She began as soon as George came to bed, but he would not hear her; he was too upset.

She could feel herself lying in bed there in the dark again, while George said his prayers on his knees. They did not use the candle a minute longer than they could help. Perhaps she had been too vehement with the old man. But he had changed towards her since she came into the house. Before she was married she thought they would all see eye to eye about everything. But no. They were all looking different ways, except perhaps George. And he was trying to look two ways at once, poor dear.

He got up and came in beside her, and declared they must wait till his old people passed to their last rest.

That was all very well, she answered, but what if they did not pass till they were ninety or a hundred? Besides, it was ridiculous to starve when

they had the means to plenty. Her father would give them seeds and cuttings and pots and make up a forcing-frame for them; Father was useful with his hands. It would not cost them a shilling. If George was going to sniff at his luck, she wasn't. She had permission to do what she liked in the orchard. Some of those old trees could come down, and time they did. She was going to make a start.

George said his father would not let her cut down a tree if it bore two apples a year.

And George was right. Perhaps she made a mistake in letting a week go past before she spoke, but she did not want to hustle the old man. Anyhow, he went back on his word and said she was not to touch the trees.

The marvellous thing was, though George knew his father was going to break his word, he stood up strong and angry when his father did break his word. He told the old man he would take his axe and cut down every tree his wife decided ought to come down. She was not to be promised everything and then denied everything. And she had more gardening knowledge than the lot of them.

Old Mr. Cole thought it was a flash in the pan with George, as she did herself. He reared up and said George could clear out and take his knowing wife with him.

George said his father was talking like a fool, and he would be in the workhouse a week after his son left.

Mr. Cole welcomed the workhouse. And Mrs.

Cole began to say 'dear, dear,' and to plead with George to be calm. She had given up pleading with her husband long ago.

But she, Arabella, told George to get his axe. George wheeled round like a soldier and marched off to the shed for it. As she was following him out of the door, she turned to give the old man a last chance to save his face, to a certain extent: "It's either the field or the orchard, Mr. Cole."

The old man glared at her for a second as if he could have shot her. Then he bowed his head. That was written in Scripture, but she had never seen it in real life before. And it pulled at your heart-strings. Though good sense could have saved all bowing.

Presently when George had come back for her, Mr. Cole said they could have the field and the orchard. She promised they would not touch the orchard for the time being, but the old man signed to them to go out. She and George went to look at the field together, because, now it was theirs, they had new eyes for it.

CHAPTER V

She wrote to her father and asked for things, and Dad came over with a cartload and went round the place and spoke his mind. He was pleased she and George had shown pluck, but he said the field was dreadful and the orchard, too. Adam's first job outside the Garden was nothing to it; he hadn't to clean up other people's mess. She and George must deepen the ditch all the way round the outside hedge. Some of the land was sour and what was not sour was exhausted. Dealer-farming, Dad said, wasn't market-gardening, and they would be lucky if they were on top of their job in five years.

George was rather frightened by Father's gloom. But she told him that was only Father's way; Scotsmen liked to picture everything black and hopeless because it made them feel they had a real job to put everything right. So she and George got on with it.

Cottage women had given up outdoor work at that time. Maria Porby was one of the last, but after she had been out trying to glean behind Mr. Tanpodder's new self-binder she came home and said she was finished. And it made the women laugh and gape over the hedge when Arabella Cole went out with a muck fork in her hand. They were jealous. They could jeer when George Cole went

to Bournebridge with a half-empty cart. And they could jeer when the Coles looked like making a better living.

Edie Board sniggered to George that his wife loped over the land like a man. He did not tell her what Edie Board said—she got it from Maria Porby—but one day he wished she was more like a woman. She did not know whether to strike him or to laugh at him; a man's clumsiness asked a lot of you when your body was spent and you had poor victuals into the bargain. George knew they would never get the field ready without her labour. He knew he could not grow early or special stuff himself, could not even strike a cutting. Yet he wanted her to sit down and knit.

She did not remind him that he had once said she moved like a thoroughbred; she promised him instead that she would be all the woman he wanted when they had the field straight. But meantime he was to put up with her looking so gaunt and brown; prosperity would soon alter all that. Her soft answer seemed to make him realize he had been unfair, because he kissed her and said she was the finest woman in the world.

But old Mr. Cole did not pass any compliments. Quite likely the old man was haunting her now and chuckling to his ghost-self over the outrageous end of all her work.

She was not a scary woman; least of all during the first years of her marriage. But one evening, months after the field had been started, he showed

her a look that made her flesh creep. He was like something out of a nightmare. His face had fallen together and his black evil eyes seemed to stare at you over his bushy moustache like a devil behind a bush in the twilight. George and his mother knew nothing about it. The old man used to wait till he caught her eye while they were sitting about in the living-room in the evening. Almost every evening it was the same. She would know his eyes were waiting for her. She would tell herself it was nonsense to be frightened by a stare. She'd tell herself to open on him and bid him behave like a Christian. But her spirit bowed in the end, and his look would say he was waiting for the time when the evil in her would deliver her soul to ruin. Something like that, the old man meant. She must have been overstrung by the heavy work and by anxiousness for the way in which George was thinking about her now, because she would have given anything to yell out loud and break the spell. But she never did.

She could not put her fear into words. She told George she was not getting on with his old people as well as she had hoped. But he laughed at her and said both his father and mother had admitted to him she was a splendid wife. She felt she could not tell George that his parents were deceitful. So she kept the truth to herself.

Maria Porby said to her one day—she had often spoken to Maria, but did not know her really

well: "And how do you get on with your old people, my dear?"

Maria was clever to spring that on her unexpectedly because her face gave her away beyond all denial. But she drew herself up—she was just outside Maria's front door—and said: "Whatever do you mean by that, Mrs. Porby?"

But Maria wasn't going to be kept her distance. "You come inside, my dear," she commanded.

Maria was five feet high, perhaps; and she had the biggest mouth and nose ever seen on a woman. Wonderfully ugly she was, but she was worth talking to.

"Arabella Cole," she said when the door was shut, "it's about time you got rid of it. It's eating you to death. There's no real trouble between you and George. And I know your old folks better than you do. I've watched them for thirty or forty years."

Maria had the touch that made you talk. Arabella put her case in a nutshell: "I've taken away the land from the old man. And he could poison me for that."

"And Mother Cole is as double-sided as a spinster, for all her meekness. She'd like the money you will earn by and by. And she'll back her husband against you meantime." When Maria had recognized the situation, she begun to wag her head from side to side; she liked to take her time: " 'Tisn't the land, my dear. Not in itself. I never heard that Ben Cole set much by his field or his

orchard. Tanpodder used to do the ploughing and pop the corn in for him. And Boy George had to do the hoeing and what else. No. Ben Cole is no land-lover. You must have land-wit before you're a land-lover. And dealers never have."

"Then I don't know what," Arabella declared. "All I do know, the old man'll be the death of me. Can you tell me why I know he spits in the fire when I go out of the room? And why I'm fool enough to let myself feel bad about it? Hate and dislike I know and can meet. But not the something that belongs to death and nothingness like Ben Cole's look."

Maria screwed her mouth in marvel, and Arabella finished off, almost indignantly: "I used to think him a plain, simple and nice old man once."

"And you dursen't have it out with him?" Maria guessed. "That's the last failing I'd put to you."

"He'd only laugh. Jeer at me for being jumpy. In front of George."

"In front of George? He knows how to play you up."

"I'm years older-looking on account of this land-work." Arabella took things as they were. "And George is a cut above the thickheads. And inclined to treasure his wife's looks. And the old people are trying to make him feel he ought to have married someone else. Someone who'd have left their land in the muddle it was and perhaps have brought George back to Mrs. Cole's religion. That's what Mother Cole wanted me to do. But I haven't. The

result is, I have to keep my mouth shut and endure everything. Rather than give them food for half-hints against me."

Maria patted her bosom: a funny trick she had. "All you've said is true. But you're hedging all the same. You know how your power runs with George's. And you wouldn't give a farthing for the old people's cackle if something bigger than their cackle weren't frightening you." Maria dovetailed her fingers as if a lot depended on the way they fitted. "You're frightened of Ben Cole's look. And there's nothing in it."

"Did you ever live, day in, day out—not with a person who hated you, not with somebody who was evil—but with somebody who was sure that evil was lying in wait for you and would certainly catch you?" Arabella asked that solemnly of Maria, and repeated: "Day in, day out."

"I can't say I have," Maria gave way.

"Then don't you talk of being frightened of nothing," Arabella wound up. And then she flung out: "Where do the old ignoramus get his power from? You tell me that, Maria Porby. And I believe I can master him."

"Master him?" The two words seemed to bring light to Maria's mind. "That is what you've done already. And I believe that's the cause of all the trouble."

"No." Arabella would not agree to that. "He has given way about the land. But he isn't mastered."

"You listen to me." Maria had it all added up in a second. "Your old people have kept their manners and their self-respect. And that took some doing on five shillings a week. Five shillings! They did not have five pence when the old man was laid up with rheumatic fever twelve years ago. He was in a dreadful state for months. And nothing coming in. George was only a nipper. And Mother Cole always had more manners than sense. She did not like going out to work. And she durst not kill the hens for fear they should not have enough money to pay the rent. How they lived through it, God and themselves best know. I don't. I've seen your ma-in-law too weak with hunger to carry a pail of water.

"When the old man was up and about once more, he meant never to be caught again. That's why you've heard he would argue all morning for an extra farthing of profit. And them that get hardly, let go hardly. When Ben Cole was laid up for good, he took it to heart. But he got over it, because his boy George was living and working as he had lived and worked. Ben did not worry much about the varnished cart and Chapel; he knew George would be beaten back to his old way of doing things in time. He liked to see George getting licked; getting beaten back into the old ways. He was happy. His old life was going on.

"But you've come. You've given George the power to live his own life; to fill the varnished cart. And you've made George work according to

your knowledge. You've beaten old Cole out of his last hope; out of his last hold on life. He has no more sense than a treadmill horse; he can only believe in dealing as the one way of getting a livelihood for him and his. But you've proved him wrong. So you've taken everything from him. All he can do to console himself and to keep the spirit of life in himself is to tell himself you're wrong, that you're piling up sorrow for yourself. That the spirit in you is going to lead you to a terrible end."

"You're about right," said Arabella. "Nice old party to live with, isn't he?"

"I don't believe he knows exactly how he is looking at you," declared Maria. "There wouldn't be so much power in his look if he did. He don't know what a terrible hold on life he's taught himself. But you have got to show him you know you have mastered him. You've got to laugh at him and show him you aren't coming to any bad end. That's where you've made the mistake, my dear. You've won; and you're letting evil scare you out of your winnings."

They sat together a long time in quiet. Then Arabella stood up: "Thank you, Maria Porby," she said. "I shan't forget." She couldn't have believed a few words from an old woman would have lifted so great a weight.

"You'll recollect he's old," said Maria when her neighbour was on the doorstep.

"That'll be all right," Arabella promised. "In a way I feel sort of reverent towards him."

But the talk with Maria hastened Mr. Cole's end. He soon found out that Arabella had escaped him. When he tried his staring trick in the evening, she nodded back to him as much as to say she knew what was troubling him.

He did not give way at once, and it took all her confidence in herself to beat off the thrust of his thought. She furnished him with special foods from Bournebridge and with all the comfort she could think of. He would not accept anything extra for a long time and then only through Mother Cole.

He spat his tobacco juice on her hand one day, but though Mother Cole was in the room and saw the offence, Arabella only smiled and told him he was a dirty old man.

"Ah!" he said, and he was more than a dirty old man when he said it. "You wait. You know your harvest."

"Yes," she said, and for a minute she believed she would have a bad time before she had run her course. "And when I have to reap my harvest, I shall abide it with the same face I'm showing you now." She showed him a steady countenance and knew she had a stronger spirit than his. And she saw that he felt the same thing at last.

He had himself carried as far as the altered field once. He said no word of praise, but he was wholly taken aback by the improvement and by the wealth of stuff that was growing there. And one day they

found him dead in his chair in the sun in front of the house. He was only fifty-six years old, though he looked all of seventy. He left a few pounds, which Mother Cole took over. The pony and the cart and the rest of the stock went to George.

CHAPTER VI

Mother Cole was sure she would not be long in following her husband, and the prospect made her devout. Sunday by Sunday she went off to Church in her close black bonnet and the black cape with shining bits of black glass on it, and her Bible and her Prayer Book in her old mittened hands. And she would come home with a face that shone with her resolve to be sweet and clean and quiet until the Gates were opened.

The exercise of body and spirit did her good, and she lasted nine years after her husband. But Arabella found it very trying to live with a person who expected an instant call to heaven, because Mother Cole thought she was qualified to rearrange the earth while she was waiting, and renewed her half-hints that Arabella was bad for George. One morning, while both of them were turning out the upstairs bedroom, Mother Cole said it was a pity Arabella had never had a baby; it would have made such a difference to George. The Coles were a fruitful lot, anyhow.

That was one of the places where Arabella could not bear the whip. She asked the old lady if she wanted to get rid of her.

"Oh, no, my dear." Mother Cole opened her eyes

like a cow taken by surprise. "You can't be got rid of now."

"No need for you to be resigned, my dear," Arabella declared. "I can clear out; don't you make any mistake about that. Gone in a minute, when you've said the word too much."

"H'm!" The old lady was not to be frightened by that sort of talk. "You may think you're perfect. But you'll have to see your faults, like we all have to."

"God Almighty!" Arabella flung her hands up. "If you Coles could forget your goodness and laugh till your insides waggled, you'd be worth living with. You aren't as it is. But I tell you, Mother Cole, if we're going to live together in this house, you'll stop niggling and nagging at me. I'd rather scrub floors and pick oakum all day than have any more of it. And, perfect or not perfect, as soon as I'm gone, your George's trade is finished. He'll go out as a labourer."

The old lady was startled by that truth, but she held on. She made herself think gardening was easy. "Everybody can be done without in this world. Even you, my dear."

"Then we'll put it to George," Arabella decided. "Which of us he wants."

Mother Cole shut her mouth. Presently she said that George was troubled enough in spirit as it was.

Arabella did not bother to say that was the first sensible remark the old lady had made that morning. She had had a tussle herself with George

the night before and she was feeling helpless and puzzled about that still. It was November—old Mr. Cole had died in the August. And the weather was as wicked as it could be: windy and cold and wet. She had been telling George for weeks he was too melancholy and tired. She could not say very much on account of the old man's death and the hard labour they had put into the field; a certain amount of tiredness and melancholy was only natural. But all the time she had felt an unnatural element in him. He had no use for her love, but everybody was like that at times. What disturbed her was the feeling that he was burrowing about in his own soul like a mole underground.

Her patience gave out when he started to get ready for Chapel for the third time. It was as tiring as a day's work to struggle the two miles in that weather and she ruled he must have some rest or he would go to pieces, body and spirit. He was twenty-eight then, but his body was very slow to fill out.

They argued the point for some time and she felt that her firmness was winning. And then—it showed the state he was in—he half-sobbed and cried out he must be clean.

"Clean!" She knew his quaint language by this time. She put her hands on his shoulders and rested her head while she tried to pour strength from her mind into his. "Oh, George!" she laughed over him. "Don't you know you can scrub the cloth to noth-

ing? You'd much better let the dews of time bleach you."

But he would not hear of that; he must have the fellowship of believing souls.

Then she tackled him directly, and he admitted he was worrying over the manner of his father's death amongst other things. She said downright if there was any blame it was hers, but his father need not have died if he had had an easy or a half-reasonable mind. George answered they should have remembered the old man's nature.

"And starved?" she demanded, because he seemed to be inventing trouble.

"We should have found some other way." He stuck to that. "But you aren't to blame, my dear. Don't think that," he said with authority. "I brought you into this house. And whatever you have done is my charge."

"Thank you." She had hard work not to lose her temper and to speak evenly and dryly. "I don't need anyone to bear my blame. What I've done, I'll stand to. Ease your mind of my guilt; clear it of so much crippling fancy, anyhow."

But he would not have it. She had to let him go out to his Chapel through the wild night. His mother paddled off to the Church, and she was left at home to look after the fire and the cat and her own thoughts.

She almost laughed to herself over George. She had married a lot more than she had expected. It

was a good thing her father had been so cranky and curst or she would not have had the patience or the wit for this conundrum. However, her fondness for George soon tuned her mind to his and made her resolve to put up with the things he loved. The next morning came the breeze with his mother, and after she had realized that the old lady had grown heart-anxious as well, she put aside all make-believe. She said downright that George was in a spiritual net and he would never go about in health and happiness until he was out of it. Mother Cole praised that clear understanding in her daughter-in-law and hoped she would do her best to cut George out of the net.

She gave him a month or two more in which to free himself, and then in January of the New Year she said to him she had not been to a music hall since two nights before she was married. Father had taken her then, for a last treat. And George must take her on the cart one Saturday when there was a good programme, and they would both go to the matinée at the Hippodrome.

She expected George to open his eyes and he did to some extent. But he was calm and decided when he refused to take her, and said she would not please him if she went to the Hippodrome any other way. When she asked why he would be displeased, he said she would not find God there.

She declared she was not going there to look for God, but for a bit of fun. Still, she might have

dropped the idea for the time, if Mrs. Cole had not gone back on her and reproached her for strengthening George's excitable side.

She felt she would go crazy if she did not get away from such overpowering people for an hour or two. The very next Saturday she took the one o'clock train from Dodnash and got to the Hippodrome in time to have a glass of beer at the "Cross Keys" before the doors opened. She thought she liked the Old Music Hall better, but that was a cheap auctioneer's place now. Really, she did not care much where she was as long as she was in a profane place, so to speak. And her heart seemed to leap and swell when the orchestra began screeching and banging just like the good old times. But soon she began to be afraid that she had grown past music halls: lost the knack of losing herself. Father never had, for all he was a Scotsman. He was as easy to please as a child. He would laugh at a joke till the tears rolled down his face and slap her on the back and shout in her ear: "My, Bella! That was a guid yin." Perhaps they had real artists when she was about twenty. She could remember the 'house' at the Old Music Hall rolling in its seat and singing 'Daisy, Daisy' as if it was drunk. Of course, these artists were smarter. She laughed a good deal at the twangy cross-talkers, but, oh, how the old knock-abouts used to make you feel you went out into the world with them and had a right good time!

The heart of the matter was that she could not get away from her house folk. The minute a turn began to drag, George popped into her mind. She had been a fool to come. Old Mother Cole was right: she would not help him to health by defying him. It was no use to say he was old-fashioned and without the ordinary instincts of a man of eight-and-twenty and ought to have cut his religious teeth twelve years ago. He was what he was. He was a regular speaker at the Chapel week-night meetings, and it would be all over the parishes that Spouting Cole's wife had been to the Hippodrome and in a beer-shop. Somebody was bound to have seen her. And her conduct would weaken George's position; damage him at Chapel and in his green-grocery trade with Chapel people in Bournebridge.

To weaken George was to weaken her own life. Well, let it be weakened, if only she got a bit of fun out of it. She would make herself like this Hippodrome. She would not be conquered by George and his mother. And her garden stuff would always find customers, Chapel favour or no Chapel favour.

She bought a piece of fish for supper and took the six o'clock train. The young porter recognized her under the lamp as he collected her ticket at Dodnash Station, and asked if she had been on the razzle-dazzle. She flicked her skirt at him and said 'not half.' And the afternoon out had done her good, because as she walked up from the station she resolved to put up with all her folks said.

They said none of the things she expected. They knew where she had slipped off to, and Mother Cole looked as though she were crammed full of suitable remarks. But George must have told her she was not to open her mouth, because she gasped over her knitting now and then like a disappointed fish.

George was almost as bobbish as the young porter at the station when he asked her how she had enjoyed the Hippodrome. She looked at him to see what he was driving at. She saw he was not quite natural, so she lied and said she had had a high old time.

George took her saying for truth and smiled as he sat in his chair in Saturday night's comfort. He shook his head: "You haven't come to the deep waters, yet, Bella. And you don't need anything strong to keep you afloat."

She could have said hundreds of things to that: such as she did not want any deep waters, not his imaginary, self-made ones, anyhow. But she unwrapped the fish she had bought for supper and showed it to Mrs. Cole, instead of making any answer. The sound of George's voice and the set of his shoulders made her understand she was being treated like a very small child.

When she went upstairs to change her dress for cooking she told herself he was just mouthing something he had heard at Chapel. And instantly she knew she was telling a lie. George was true to

himself; his wrestling with himself had made him turn to the big and strong things in life.

She could not go back to the Hippodrome. She would not give George the chance to treat her as a child again.

CHAPTER VII

Maria Porby might have been private to Arabella's thoughts as they wandered into the past, because she said when she came in that evening that she reckoned Chapel had been the ruin of George. George was the one topic in Dodnash, but even so, Maria did not start on him until she found out that her friend wanted to talk of past times.

Arabella was putting out seedlings with a candle as well as the lamp. The fire was bright and the cat was coiled up in a reassuring indifference to all human worries. While Maria settled herself and declared it was a pity that rocking-chairs were going out of fashion, Arabella brought a bottle of stout and two glasses. Maria grew astounded and stiff, for there had not been a drop of liquor in that cottage since Old Cole's death. Easy-minded as Maria was, it seemed hardly decent to start up with drink again while the man of the house was on trial for his life.

"I brought home a dozen in the cart this morning," Arabella rapped out. "I had to have something."

"Were you bad?" Maria caught the strung-up note.

"Middling." Arabella tried to rein in her feelings

and abused the world in general for further easement. "Sometimes I don't know what's come to people. I could hit them, if I did not watch myself and tell myself it is only natural they should feel queer when they see me. I don't mind the lot that have judged George before he is tried and say they don't want our trade any more. But the ones that have forced themselves to believe George is innocent and then don't look at what I'm selling them, out of compassion, I can't stand them."

Maria took a sup of stout, and when Arabella had got over her outburst she asked, just like dropping a stone into a still pond: "You believe George is innocent yourself, don't you?"

Arabella said in a loud voice: "I know he is innocent. And I know he is guilty."

That curious answer satisfied Maria absolutely. And to show Arabella that she was content with her standpoint, she said in an airy way: "Mrs. Beales, the school-house caretaker, was saying a tramp did it. That's what she is going to say if she has to give evidence."

"They're all going to say something wonderful," Arabella flared out. "Everybody will say their say, from the Judge downwards. And they'll all say nothing to the point."

"That's beyond anybody but God A'mighty," soothed Maria. "And I reckon He's arranged for things to work themselves out without Him saying anything."

"Mr. Sulyer came to see me yesterday." Ara-

bella took no notice of the soothing. "He said to me: 'Oh, we're going to get him off, Mrs. Cole. None of your London lawyers and counsels for us. We've got local men, and this is a local affair. We know how to vindicate our own: our innocent.'" Arabella laughed. "You should have seen the shine on the old man's face. Oh, I know he and his like are putting up the money. And I'm grateful to him. But it's the same tale now as it has been all these years: nothing real. George and me: we're the jam-pot for the flies. I've had newspaper men here, photographing, sketching and talking. And, as you know, I've got rid of them pretty quick. But all told, I declare before God, I'd sooner they swung me and George together, this very night, right or wrong. So long as they did it quick. And"—Arabella grew as shrill as the night-owl—"kept their silly noses and eyes and wits out of our private affairs."

"But look you,"—Maria stood up in her astonishment. Arabella had never done any raving before to-night,—"murder can't be a private affair. As you have sense enough to know."

But Arabella was past argument and she shrilled out: "Murder is the most private affair on earth." She had almost said a lot more, but what she read in Maria's face made her check her whole being and sigh: "Ah, well!"

Maria did not say what she had guessed, but declared cheerfully: "You'll be stared at more and more, till the trial is over."

"No, I shan't," Arabella gleamed in a kind of childish triumph. "After I finished this morning I went to see Walls, the greengrocers next the Royal Standard Hotel. And they jumped at the chance to take over our private customers and sent a man round to see them to-day. And I shall pop all our stuff into Walls in the mornings before the starers are out of bed."

"You were right," Maria praised. "But you have sacrificed the trade that cost you sixteen years to build up."

Arabella did not stop to pity herself. "We're done, Maria. George may get off or not; but we're marked people in this part of the world for ever. And it's quite on the cards I shall flit from here before the Assizes, if I can sell our stock to anybody."

And then it was that Maria tried to sum up by saying that Chapel might get George off, but Chapel had been the ruin of George.

"Ah!" Arabella answered as if she were used to everybody having a lot more wisdom than herself and George.

"Ah as much as you like!" Maria was provoked. "Chapel was never the right sort of help for your George, anyway a Chapel run by such an ignorant old farmer as Sulyer. Oh, I know George had to grow as he could. But your mother-in-law was right, though she was such a tiresome old fool her opinions would not go down with anybody. The only hope for George was to steer clear of every-

thing that excited him. Church sing-song would have kept his mind quiet like nothing else. But when Sulyer went in for those revival meetings, he gave George his poison. It's true we haven't had any revival meetings for six years now. But your George would walk ten miles there and back for a hallelujah service while they were the fashion. And that left its mark. When the meetings went out of fashion he still had the taste for hysterics; ordinary life had no flavour for him. He found some of the flavour he wanted when he mixed himself up with Cissie Rouse. And he had the power to make a young woman forget her arithmetic. And when you get two muddle-heads trying to straighten a muddle, you can lay your life it'll be the funeral of one of them."

Arabella nodded and went on dibbling in her plants. She selected them mechanically and set them mechanically after thirty years of practice. "I have thought as you think, Maria. I've thought just the opposite," she said. Then she let her hands be still and turned to her neighbour: "My father used to say George was tinny. I wouldn't accept it at first, but afterwards I came to see what Dad meant. I've often told myself George was no more than a tin figure of a man stuck on a roof to catch all the winds of the world. He did not grieve and laugh about the things you and me grieve and laugh about; and in that he wasn't human, but tinny. But the things that did touch him—God and the world and right thinking and all that—they tore

him to pieces. And in that he was more than a tin man. This room we're sitting in has seen some sights, I can tell you." Arabella looked all round and shuddered.

"I know." Maria looked round the room as well, but with a knowing eye. "He used to fight his devils here."

"His angels," said Arabella.

Maria did not understand and went on with her own idea: "When I was a girl, I've seen preachers such as George as good as conjure up the devil. The degree folks were terrified, you could have sworn Old Nick was ramping about."

Arabella shook her head: "Things have altered since your day, Maria. You never went to any of our meetings here."

"I didn't." Maria was emphatic. "One taste fifty years ago was enough for a lifetime. I was only a wench. But I was old enough to dislike my soul being terrified into virtue and salvation, and what not."

"Dodnash Chapel revivals were different," said Arabella. And then her voice seemed to flame out: "You don't know how different. I believe they were a thousand times worse than yours. Folks were tempted into virtue and salvation with us. Bribed and corrupted into righteousness. Promised heaven and glory and marvel. Not a word about terror and the devil, and not a ha'porth of sense."

"I see." Maria admitted she had not realized the change.

"And yet I'm wrong." Arabella tried to be exact. "That marvel and glory had to be bought by self-torture and by something very like self-destruction. I used to pull George's leg, but it was too stiff." The mention of George's name made Arabella leave off speaking about revivals generally. Her eyes steadied and her body quietened as she called up old details out of her memory. "It was just after the Boer War. The war didn't cause the trouble in George, but it brought it on."

"I recollect," said Maria. "Thousands of people went funny. England was in the wrong because she was big and strong. That's how they took to arguing. And I went and bought my old man a khaki waistcoat with Union Jack buttons."

"Somebody clever had been talking to George," Arabella explained. "We were doing trade with the better people of Bournebridge. They weren't very much better—tradespeople who liked the best in the garden line. One of them must have told George the Boers were just like his old father. That was enough. He used to pray till dawn that the sin he had sinned against his father should not be repeated against the Boers. I would drop off to sleep and wake up and feel his place was empty. But it was no use my scolding him for meddling with things he knew only a ha'porth about. He said he was going to pray till the Word came from on high, and I held my tongue and wondered what wild idea would come into his head. He quietened by degrees.

But though months went past he did not forget he was waiting for the Word.

"Put it down that if you shout long enough for the Word, you'll get it, whether good or bad for you. George got the Word. The revivals started and they started round here at the meeting George was at and with George while he was praying. He told me he felt suddenly lifted up and carried into a place of great peace. And when he broke out into words of triumph, the people near him had to believe him and caught the same sense from him."

"I recollect it well," said Maria. "I used to ask the parson if the Chapel people weren't nearer the secret power than his lot. But he used to answer I was too much of a heathen to give information to. The old parson always had a drive at me when he got the chance." Maria laughed. She had been in a travelling show when she was young and before she caught Jimmy Porby in the marrying mood, and she was proud of the ideas she had picked up in her vagabondage.

Arabella did not offer any comment on the mystical side of revivalism; she went on to the practical result to George. "I never was Wesleyan enough to find out what a Wesleyan meant," she said. "Mr. Sulyer and Nat Curtis, the retired builder, did everything at our Chapel bar the washing and dusting. They might have known what was to be believed about baptism, but precious few else. That did not mean the congregation could go on just anyhow. George had been third or fourth man for

a long time. And even after he was sort of revival leader, Sulyer and Curtis weighed him to the last ounce before they asked him to take the morning service.

"I was in a dither when I went to that service. I didn't offer George any advice. I believe that was the first time I realized how much he had set himself apart from me by his prayers and what not. I was anxious because I had hopes it was the beginning of responsibility for him; a chance to get into decent and orderly preaching. The gardening that satisfied me did not satisfy him.

"He looked like a man who had given his hands the best washing of the week when he stood up in front of us. He was almost a gawk in his bigness. But he did fill the eye, and presently you felt he knew he was in the right place. He was best at the praying; he had had plenty of practice in the night watches at home. He made us all wait till he was ready, and when he did begin, I must say I've never heard anything to touch it. Perhaps you've been in a big field and seen two or three birds flying into the sunset; high above tree and house. Well, George was a bit like that."

Arabella sat like a statue while she revived her further memories of George's first triumph. Then she confessed: "I was younger then, Maria. We were prosperous in our small way. I hadn't been knocked about. And I didn't like George's meaning, when you took the spirit of it. Sitting in that pew I said to myself: 'You've made a beautiful thing

of whimpering this day, George Cole, if ever man did. But it's whimpering all the same.' It was only later on I remembered the poor time he had when he was twelve years old and the mark that must have made on his spirit. I don't believe we ever get over the early marks. Even if we wipe them out of our mind, they're somewhere, guiding us.

"However, the old dames came up to me outside and said George was sent to be a refreshment to the people. And then Sulyer and Curtis came out without noticing me amongst the old dames. Sulyer had his head on one side like an old cock in doubt about a worm.

" 'Imitative, Nathaniel, imitative, I think!' Nathaniel was Curtis's name, you remember. And Sulyer was trying to draw him about George.

" 'The man's a natural priest,' Curtis said. Curtis was a simpler man than Sulyer; I mean, he took what was before him and got on with it.

" 'Eh?' Sulyer pretended to scoff. 'I think I saw some of your own gestures, Nathaniel. And some of the mannerisms of our friend at Dodnash Church.'

" 'A young man must copy somebody.' Curtis would not be shaken. 'The young man has had no education and no experience. But I have listened in this chapel for thirty years and I can remember no one, save one old man, with a bigger sense of God. My only fear is whether that sense will remain with him. It's a gift to terrify any man.'

"I could see Sulyer squeezing his face up in

doubt,—out of the corner of my eye. 'He has the flavour of an actor to me, Nathaniel,' I heard him sum up. I could have laughed to hear Old Sulyer had been to the theatre before he was converted; I was quite refreshed by it. Perhaps I did smile, because Sulyer seemed to feel somebody was listening to him with all their might and main and he moved off with Curtis.

"Sulyer may have been more careful than Curtis because he was a better educated man. But Sulyer was the only Nonconformist farmer for miles round and that made him a bit stuck-up and extra watchful that Chapel did not let him down. But at that time George had the new style and people would hear him. And what with George filling the eye so mightily and saying nothing outrageous in actual words, Sulyer got used to him and recommended him everywhere. And I came to think that Chapel and Sulyer had been the means whereby George had found himself."

CHAPTER VIII

"I DID not give way to that notion all at once; as I have mentioned, there was a part of me that did not approve of George's doctrine and that part was stiff in me.

"Sulyer recommended George. And one time I went down to Bournebridge to a big hall where George was to speak amongst several college-trained ministers. I dare say you heard enough about it at the time, Maria, and I don't recall it for boasting's sake: what George had, isn't a thing to boast of. But when he was set up against these placed gentlemen, I had to give George best. While they were talking about getting somewhere with God, George was there. I cried, amongst a lot of criers. But I didn't accept his doctrine because I cried, but because I had to admit its value by a wider standard than Dodnash Chapel.

"I forgot that if George's gift was beyond other people's, the nourishment of it would be unnatural as well. But I was reminded of that soon enough.

"In the beginning I spoiled him. I admit it. And I often think if I had made things more rough for him he would have gone slower and grown into steadiness. But if he had to go off early to a meeting it was only fair for me to do a bit extra and finish his row as well as my own. And if he got

lost when he was weeding and dibbling and stood bolt-up and stared and dreamed, I would not interfere; he looked just like one of the Apostles with that beard of his. There were short-tempered hours when I did let out on him, but I was soon quiet again. I believe his little bit of fame had gone to my head. I might know I was looking like an old woman of ninety with pouches under my eyes and my joints might be falling apart for tiredness, but my wonder at his work and a word of praise and thanks from him would make me feel my help counted more than my looks or my pain.

"And yet I doubt if I was any real help. I doubt if a woman is ever any direct value to a man of his nature. Perhaps up to a point. But where he begins wrestling with his own nature, she's useless. George would come home looking like death. And when I asked him what was the matter, he'd cry out that the Spirit had left him and turn his face from me and moan and grieve as if there was no more hope for him. All I could do was to keep my mouth shut till he felt like eating. And no doubt it was bad for me, not to be treated like a woman by him.

"It's easy to see now that he made the mistake of trying to live on the heights all the time and all that was wrong with him was exhaustion of the mind. But how were we to know it was a simple matter like that? We had only learned as far as twelve times twelve, so to speak. And Sulyer did not help. I believe he felt that George's lament about being forsaken by the Spirit was a help at the

meetings. And kept George humble. You recollect how crazy a lot of sensible-looking men were about soul-saving at that time?"

Maria had just managed to nod agreement when Arabella burst out again: "Thank the Lord, Sulyer did not help. Because I had more than I could carry. And burst up everything."

Maria evaded the opinion that Arabella challenged: "How long ago would that be?" she asked.

"Six years ago, this next month," Arabella reckoned.

"Yes, you had a row with Sulyer just below his house. I recollect you telling me, well." Maria was satisfied with her own memory. "But you never told me and I never thought how the cause of that row went back to the Boer War." Maria grinned at her little joke.

"I don't know how far back the cause reached," said Arabella savagely. "What I do know is, that we had had a dirty January and a wet February, and there was everything to be done in the field. George told me he was going off for a week to conduct a mission on the other side of the county. Sulyer had said he was the man for the job.

" 'No, George,' I said. Just that and no more.

"My quietness made him jump, and then he seemed to see how things stood. He said he was sorry and of course he could not be away a whole week. He went off to tell Sulyer, but when he came back he was laughing. He said we should be his keep in pocket as he was lodging with friends of

the mission, and then he passed me a sovereign from Sulyer to pay another man. You recollect the farms were paying fourteen shillings a week then . . ."

Maria recollected.

". . . I didn't tell George five pounds a week wouldn't get us a man who would work as we worked. If he couldn't see it himself, I wouldn't disturb him. I took him down to Bournebridge Station in the cart and saw him off. And I suppose I had an idea I would have things on a better footing by and by. But I met Sulyer, as you've just said, at the bottom of his hill. I didn't want to see him till I had my mind clear, so I just gave him 'good day.' But he put up his hand for me to stop. He was riding his white horse and had then finished his farming round when I had done five hours' work. He began to say he was coming along to thank me for letting George go to the mission; he knew I was the one who did the work in this house. And amongst other things Sulyer said it was quite on the cards that George would be a regular missioner soon and paid well enough for me to be beyond worry.

"I felt something happening in me when he said that. And all I said was: 'Thank you, Mr. Sulyer.'

"He knew he had not gone down with me. He started off to say missioning was, through divine grace, George's career, and looking back on the past it was plain to see I had been a wonderful wife to him.

"I kept my breath steady, but I must have smiled

in a homely way when I said I was a bit too old to be hypnotized.

"Sulyer opened his eyes. Partly because he didn't believe I knew the word till he heard it in my mouth, and partly because I was so dead against him and his like, though a Chapel-goer.

" 'Hypnotized!' he said with a laugh. 'What d'ye mean by that, Mrs. Cole?"

"You know Sulyer is a fine-looking man for a farmer; beautiful white hair and always dressed in black with a collar-point up against his clean-shaved chin. And his old eye meant me to feel I was pretty silly to come up against such a quiet old gentleman as himself. But it was no use him eyeing me, and his smile took me to the stage where I could not look at him and keep my temper. I spoke clear to him: 'You're a good man, Mr. Sulyer. You helped my George when he was rather a lout and you've helped him and me since. And all round you've done a lot more good than these dead-alive Conservatives, as they call themselves. But it's time you added sense to your goodness.' And when I had said that much, the words began to come out of me like hailstones: 'Thanks to you and your creed, to Moody and Sankey, day in, day out, year in, year out, to soul-hunting year in, year out, my George has hypnotized himself into believing he's one of the saints. He isn't; he's only a painted board of a man, all surface and no depth. Or if there's depth, it isn't healthy depth. You're old enough to see it. But you won't see it. You've hyp-

notized yourself into the belief the world is to be saved your way, and can be saved no other way.'

"I could see him screwing his mouth at me while I was speaking. And I was on my feet shouting at him at the last. I must have been a sight under the elms in that holl. 'You can take it from me, William Sulyer,' I said, and I gave him no title because I was on a level with him in that temper—'you can take it from a slaving, ignorant, hard-bit woman that you're a glorified fool. You're a farmer; you wouldn't grow corn without muck: not year after year. But that's what you've learned my George. And that's why he is weak and white and wastey in spirit. He's suffering from a shortage of muck! Shortage of muck! All the richening things in the world are sin, according to you—muck. But I'm done with you. And my George is going to be done with you. All the saved souls in the world don't repay me for a husband without warmth in him by bed or board; for a mate always sick with his conundrums about sin and mercy; for a man who must have ten thousand angels propping him up before he durst totter out into the world.'

"I don't know how much I said. But when I found myself sitting down again on the cart-seat and feeling a bit weak and ashamed, I looked straight at Sulyer and said: 'And now you know what his missus is like, you'd better think twice before you make a missioner of George Cole.'

" 'Ah!' He wagged his head at me. 'Your father was a Scotch Tory, wasn't he?'

" 'He was,' I allowed.

"Father's character seemed to settle the doubt in Sulyer's mind. 'I shall take your advice, Mrs. Cole,' he said. 'And think twice.' Then he looked me over with a wonderful lot of patience, considering all I had said to him. 'And I'll ask you to think twice, as well.'

" 'I shan't,' I declared back to him.

" 'You and your husband have opposite natures,' he said to me as calmly as you please. 'He is a slow grower: much slower than you are. The work he is doing now doesn't represent his fullness: that's to come. And I believe he may reach very near to true saintliness in time. If,' he said carefully, 'if his friends, his lovers, are patient with him. I shall go on helping him, whatever you do, Mrs. Cole. But the kind of help I give him must depend on you, naturally. I would ask you to remember that saints are very rare in this world; very easily shipwrecked in their early voyage. You have a big responsibility, Mrs. Cole.'

"The old man's quietness took the fire out of me. And before I left him I promised I would not contrary George for the time being."

CHAPTER IX

"You're neglecting your stout," said Maria, whilst Arabella rested from her memory of the encounter with Sulyer.

Arabella saw she had not tasted a drop and made up for lost time.

"That did you good," Maria said feelingly.

Arabella looked at her empty glass. "Up to a point," she admitted. "But all the stout in the world won't give me back the freshness and the spring I've lost in the last six months. I can make up my mind to that."

Maria coughed modestly and said: "I'm a greedy old woman."

Arabella saw that Maria's glass was empty and must have been for the last half-hour. When she had made good she set the bottle beside Maria because she did not feel like any more herself.

Maria started the ball again presently; she ought to have been in bed beside her Jimmy, but she was comfortable and she could see the talk was doing Arabella good. There had been too much frenzy about her in the earlier part of the evening. Now, her look might be sad, but it was as calm as the sea. And when Maria said that George never went for a missioner, but she had never heard why Arabella decided to contrary him, Arabella answered with-

out any apparent heat that the turn of things made her contrary George:

"I had to go against him at the end of his first mission, the very one that was the cause of the row with Sulyer. So I had to go against him before he was fully convinced of his own weakness. And if I tell you only what happened at the time, you must bear in mind the years before when he had been tearing at all the known things in himself.

"I expected him home in the middle of the Sunday morning after his week's duty and after he had slept and breakfasted. But he turned up in the middle of the Saturday night. He looked like a ghost when I got down to the door to let him in and he dropped on the couch as if he had been shot. I set the candle down on the table and felt near dying myself for a minute. He told me afterwards he had caught the night mail across the county and walked out from Bournebridge, straight on top of his last and biggest meeting. I will say the woman he lodged with had tried to persuade him not to be such a fool. But he told her he had to be in time for Dodnash Chapel. My belief is, he knew he would not sleep and thought he might as well travel home.

"I had some milk in the house and made him take it and got him to bed. And all the time I was chanting to myself: 'Never again, George Cole. Never again; not if you were a hundred saints rolled into one.' I did not care if he might have been all right if I had been with him during the

week to look after him. The thing in me that hated the spirit that had got hold of him was all afire.

"He slept till ten. I heard him moving about upstairs while I was busy with the house, and called up to him to go back to bed. But he came down for a quick breakfast and Chapel. I declared I would lock the door in his face before he should go. He settled down; I think he was glad to have someone to compel him to rest. . . .

"When he woke up again I had his dinner ready. But he could not eat much. His mother had not sense enough to control her fears. I could not blame her, because he was still looking like a death's head. Still, I told her to hush. But she kept pressing him to eat and lecturing him on the value of food as if he were a child, and I was not surprised when George said his head was like dust inside and he must go out and get some air. When he was on his feet he began to stagger about the room as if he was blind-drunk and before I could catch him he was lying on the floor in tears and sickness.

"I will say that Mother Cole was useful when it was too late. She helped me upstairs with him and to undress him. And then I sent her off and comforted him as best I could.

"He was not much use about the place for a day or two, but he wanted to go to his week-night meeting as usual. I said to myself it was time we had an understanding. And to him I said he was not to sing another hymn-tune for a month.

"He said he could not live without the Word.

" 'Then,' I answered him, 'you'll very soon live with it in a lunatic asylum.' And when I saw he had had a glimpse of the same idea himself, I followed up sharp: 'I don't know where you found it, but you have got the knack of bringing spirit to people or out of people. Your mind is running on this uncanny power all the time. You aren't an educated man. Perhaps you've got your knack because you aren't educated. But an educated man can save himself from one idea; that's his weakness and his strength. And what you have to do is to learn to master the idea that's mastering you and tearing your body and soul to bits. You've to let the quiet and dull side of your nature be the medicine for the lively side. Or you're done.'

"George had had a bit of a scare. And my talk on top of that made him lie snug for a while. I was thankful. I met Sulyer at the Chapel and told him how it was with George. Sulyer wanted to come and see him, but I said the less religious talk, the less poison.

"I could see Sulyer's face change into hardness at my blunt words, but I did not take them back. I did not believe Sulyer had enough sense to help in the making of a saint, any more than I had. And what you don't understand is best left alone.

"That was what happened,—George was left alone. And I was blamed for it.

"It might have been middle summer and George was feeling well in himself when he was told. You see, he was simple and never guessed his overlords

had favoured him at one time as a man to be pushed forward.

"He had taken somebody's box to Dodnash Station in the cart. He was a long time gone, and when he came back he looked ten or fifteen years older.

" 'Oh!' I said to myself. I had not told him a word of my cross-talk with Sulyer—he would not have seen my meaning if I had. 'I wonder what version you've been told.' And I asked him what was the matter.

" 'Nothing,' he said, meaning he would turn things over by himself for a year.

" 'You'd best out with it,' I said. A wrong conclusion took a lot of moving out of his head.

" 'I met Mr. Curtis,' he grudged to me. 'At the station.'

" 'Oh!' I said. Curtis or Sulyer, they both thought along the same rut. 'And what did Nat Curtis have to say?'

"George had pain in answering me: 'Curtis said he was glad to see I was better. But it was a pity I felt the strain so much. They had thought of sending me to other places. And they had money enough to pay you to go with me. But when they added up everything, they thought it wiser not to give me a call to permanent preaching.'

" 'Curtis was talking big,' I said for side-talk; I couldn't look straight at George for the minute. 'A permanent job would have to be settled in Bournebridge, if not London.' George did not say

anything, so I pattered on. 'Still, they might have called Curtis and Sulyer into the talk.'

" 'To be sure,' said George, and his face began to gleam. 'I told Curtis he had been shortsighted. I had rested so that I could do my best. I was taking care to speak only when I felt the Spirit with me, and all the servants of God had the experience of being deserted. And I asked Curtis if his ideas or my life were much in the balance when fresh forces were coming to the world. Curtis was perplexed; he patted my shoulder in the station-yard and the tears stood in his eyes. And then he told me my wife had told Sulyer I was being poisoned by so much religious thought and in her woman's way she had had more than she could bear. And he and Sulyer had decided they must not make more trouble between man and wife.'

"George looked me up and down and I knew my trouncing was coming. It came in quietness and it stung: 'Sulyer and Curtis knew, of course, that you'd be the ruin of my work in time.'

"Then he grew a shade more loud in his wrath: 'When did you tell Sulyer you had had more than enough?'

"He had no cause to ask that question except out of deep mistrust. But I answered him straight: 'The day you left for your mission.'

" 'And when I came back, you said I should be all right if I made a medicine of quietness.' He dropped his face to his hands when he knew definitely I had been playing a double game with him.

It did not matter that I had done everything for the best; to save myself and him from collapse. No. I had told him one tale and Sulyer another; deceived him. That was all he could see.

"He told me so: I was more dangerous than a wicked woman; I pretended to look after him and to believe as he did, and I was as treacherous as thin and rotten ice. Never, never once in all the years we had been married had I said a thing that had strengthened him,—only half and half things that had left his soul more dependent on itself. A man was crippled without a woman's faith. I was certainly fit to look after a market-garden. But he could never hope for one hour of real fellowship from me.

"I suppose he had been taught to expect inside help from God and from his neighbours; Chapel made a big point of 'strengthening one another's hands.' And so he must have thought he had a terrible indictment against me.

"But I did not submit to it. As long as my old Dad loved me,—and he did,—I did not ask him to think as I did. He was welcome to hit me over the head if I differed from him,—if he could catch me.

"Mind you, I answered George quietly. He had not shouted at me. And all the time I felt he was like a man in a fog; that he knew missioning was not wholly his life, though he would have sacrificed himself for it. So I pleaded with him that God Himself could not companion his soul,—it was too all over the place,—let alone a poor woman doing

fourteen hours' work a day. And if George Cole thought he had failed for ever because a parcel of stiff-minded old men did not know how to make proper use of him, beyond tearing him to pieces, then George Cole was a bigger fool than I took him for. Nature was going to make a man of him yet.

"For a minute he looked as though he would be angry with me and I would have welcomed it, but then he seemed to remember my double-dealing and turned his back on me and marched off."

CHAPTER X

For a while there was quiet in the room. Both women felt they had travelled a definite stage with George. And though Arabella soon realized there had been no such thing as a definite stage in George's life and all the elements in him had continued after the end of his purely religious activity, her face set in self-reproach over the manner of that end.

Maria observed the self-reproach and comforted: "I don't see what else you could have done, my dear. You can't talk straight to a man who won't hear straight. And I should say it was lucky for George you broke him before the spirit died out of revivaling. He would have been desperate when he felt the Power dwindling away, as it did dwindle. And you would have had a wreck on your hands for the rest of your life. No. You were the common sense in this house from the day you stepped over the threshold. And you were right to live up to it."

"I don't know,"—the old memory had weakened Arabella,—"there's common sense and the sense beyond it. I have often wondered if I had been different, if I had kept my mouth shut and gone with him, whether he would not have stood the religious strain. And settled into something fine. I

believe he only broke down on that first week's mission because I was not with him. But somebody had to look after our trade." Arabella dismissed the old debate. And then she declared suddenly: "I don't believe George ever turned his face fully to me again."

"Oh dear!" Maria mourned. "But Cissie Rouse did not come along till four years ago. Two years after the upset between you and George."

Arabella laughed scornfully at the rule-of-thumb way in which people—even Maria—worked out things. "Cissie didn't. And George did not find any other woman either. He didn't need any. You must not make the mistake I made when I married George: think he was a warm-blooded man because he had a big body and deep eyes. There was only one part of him alive till a couple of years, or even one year, ago. His mind was alive; and a puzzled groping mind at that. That was the meaning of his religion, for all his shouting about light and deliverance; groping, an everlasting groping."

"Why did he want to grope so much? More than other people?" Maria pondered. "Just the luck of his make-up?"

"That's about it," agreed Arabella. "You recollect his father had that back-of-time look and his mother had a lot of Church sense. I believe George inherited his mother's wit and tongue and his father's feelings. He was a blend, a marriage of natures in himself. And when I chocked him off his first outlet, he must have gone back to his

father's experiences and recollected the old man's stunted sort of life as a sort of well of refreshment and strength. Though I swear I can't understand the sort of mind that has to go to stunted things for refreshment."

"Did he say?"

"Not to me. He kept on his Bible Class and he would take the service now and again. He was a lot quieter and said things that showed his mind had been dwelling on worldly stuntings; how the condition in which a lot of people lived was no compliment to human common sense and much less to God's. He made me open my eyes one day in wonder and pleasure when he broke out saying that ninety-nine per cent of our prayers were already granted only we hadn't the gumption to get up and take the grant. 'Well,' I said to myself, 'you may be ignorant of what some of us pray for on the quiet, but I've done you good; I've thrown you on yourself and made you get over the whimpering stage.' "

"It sounded more like strength," Maria approved.

"We'll say a certain amount of change went on in his spirit," Arabella allowed cautiously. "It was the time of the old age pensions and sticking on insurance stamps; the talk of these things. And as I've told you, George was one of the weather-cocks on the roof and got all the winds of the world, and when the religious wind died away he was ready for the next, the political one. You must recollect

he was as much a townsman as he was a countryman; the same as I am. We are in and out of Bournebridge and you can't keep a town trade without being able to chat about town things; things in the papers.

"You get a liking to read the papers. You're drawn on. Not because there is much sense in the papers or in what townspeople say about what's in them; there are just as many cranky people in Bournebridge as in Dodnash. The worst of the lot was Mr. Lemerle, the architect. His family was French a few hundred years ago, and he married a Frenchwoman one time when he was abroad. But it did not work. She missed the French flavour in Bournebridge and spent her life somewhere else, with the consequence her husband did not know what comfort was. He was another man who could not look after himself; never washed or shaved clean; never hung his clothes on himself properly. But he seemed to flourish in discomfort, and always had a monkey's grin for George. 'The new thinking man,' he would call George, and chuck newspapers and books into the cart and bid George study the new mental architecture that was going to be fashionable for the next hundred years. Such papers they were: New Dawns, New Heralds, New Trumpets, New Bugles, New Worlds, New Ages, New Eras. I thought the world was going mad. But George read every word.

"Then there was that young fellow that used to be at Walls. Walls took our extra stuff at whole-

sale price,—they said they never saw cabbages and lettuces like mine for shape and firmness,—and this young fellow was in the receiving yard. He was a nice sort and he took to George and told him to come down to their bit of a club one night.

"George must have felt he was to make touch with something almost as good as revivaling and asked about the club. It was in a room at the 'Seven Stars,' that plain-looking pub on the road alongside the Dock Railway.

"George said he was teetotal and hated pubs. But the young man explained the club was in its early days and was glad of a room for nothing. As long as George took a glass of ginger-ale now and again for the good of the house, nobody would beseech him to drink beer; not every landlord was Liberal or Tory. They had men from every union in Bournebridge and they wanted a few country members like George; men who could see things and put their views into words.

"George put the question to me. I had not heard a word of the club till that minute, and you could have knocked me down with a feather. A week or two before, a pub was the nearest way to hell. And now there was a doubt about the nearest way.

" 'Well?' I turned the matter over. I had no personal objection to pubs, but I was keeper of George's conscience. 'There's this about it, George. As long as you live you will sell patent medicine of some sort . . .'

" 'Patent medicine?' How he did rear up!

" 'Oh,' I said with a laugh, 'for the love of God don't be so solemn. The most of men are satisfied if they can get a decent living out of a decent day's work, with a bit of fun now and then. But you get no more satisfaction out of your day's work than if you were picking oakum. You must have glory all the time. And to holloa a new heaven or a new earth is your idea of all-the-time glory. I don't mind; it might be whisky.'

" 'And you don't believe in either a new heaven or a new earth,' he said to me in sorrow and anger.

" 'That isn't the point,' I said to him sharply; I had come to the conclusion it was no use to argue with him, even when I had something good on the tip of my tongue. 'The point is, you do believe in all that's new. And if a pub is the only place where you can hear what is new and join with them that are working for the new, you must go to the pub. That's plain sense.'

"He was pleased with my statement for a minute, and then his face took a remembering look: 'I feel so often,' he said, 'that I can hear wonderful singing. And at times I feel to be walking in the woods with the bluebells and the anemones all shimmering under the tender green of the new leaves. That's valuable to me, that experience of the soul. And I don't want to lose it by going into pubs. I don't want a life that's less valuable than the one I've got.'

" 'That's a sensible way to look at it,'—I never

mocked his high-flown way of speech,—'but so long as your mind knows what is good, you can always come back to it, if pubs don't satisfy you.'

"He was still doubtful when he went off to the club, but when he came home he said it was better than he expected. There were all sorts, and it was queer how they disliked each other inside a general liking, so to say. But there was a biting zeal about some of the older men and they had a big vision of the new world.

"I did not pay much heed to George's clack; I was satisfied he was going to be happy again. It meant more work for me, as he bicycled off three or four nights every week and the evening is the best time for a lot of garden work. But by and by his talk began to alter still more; everything wasn't ruled directly out of the word of God. He began to notice what men were like, what I was like instead of whether I was a child of grace.

"You may recall George went up to the 'White Horse' here and Ted Howes the landlord made him drink a glass of beer before he allowed him into the smoke-room, and declared, half-serious and half-joke, he would chuck George out if he tried to start any of his clubs there. Ted Howes needn't have been so valorous; the old fellows—your husband amongst 'em, Maria—didn't want to be bothered with clubs and politics. George had more success at the Railway Tavern amongst the platelayers and porters. But what I want to say is this,—that George was soon welcome back at the 'White

Horse,' and Ted Howes himself would have long arguments, though George never touched more than a ginger-beer or lemonade, as the case might be. And after the first noise, his Chapel people never said a word against George's new habits.

"I met Tanpodder one time, and the slow old horse was bold enough to stop me and wink at me: 'So your George is turned politician, Mrs. Cole!' he sighed at me out of his red face.

"Tanpodder was about two years after the event, but you can't twit his sort of neighbourly nature. So I said: 'Yes, Mr. Tanpodder. He finds it takes less out of him than the other thing.'

"Tanpodder brightened up and tried to score against George. 'I've heard say your George is after taking more out of me, and people like me.'

" 'Well, I've no doubt you'll let him know long before he'd taken enough out of you,' I said.

"But Tanpodder was too uneasy about politics to laugh much, and he wound up in a dismal way: 'I suppose he's one of the sort that must wag their tongues or die, your George.'

"I took the last word as we parted: 'Yes, Mr. Tanpodder, that's my George. And though it's strange to you, there's a lot of people who think there's brain behind his tongue-wagging.'

"Tanpodder was still shaking his head when I went round the corner. But the fact that an old slow-coach like him had spoken, meant that George was established."

CHAPTER XI

"Even to-day I don't believe he knows what happened to him: what went on in his nature," said Arabella as she weighed George's disestablishment. "Politics have dropped from him in his trouble and he has gone back to religion. His mind is full of thoughts of himself as a lost sheep, of accusations of sin and wickedness and hundreds of words that don't mean much to me: not in connection with him, anyhow."

"Well," Maria winked, "the Bible was written by bachelors mostly. So you can't expect much mother-sense in it. And you've been a bit of a mother to George, haven't you?"

"Just to show you,"—Arabella took no notice of Maria's remark,—"I asked him when I saw him in prison whether he would come back here when his innocence was proved. Oh, I might have offered him poison. He started away from me and prayed he might never look again on the fields he had walked in obstinacy and pride. As if he was thinking more about his offence against God than being tried for murder.

"Yet you may say he is right to use such words. He must have known what he was doing with Cissie and thought he knew better than he did. That's where obstinacy and pride come in.

"You know there were two uproars over Cissie. The first was four years ago. George was thirty-six then and just beginning to fill out properly. And with his name for being able to speak and his beard and his six foot of length he was something more than Cissie Rouse expected to meet in the country.

"Her father was at the electricity works in Bournebridge. And these well-paid mechanics think well of themselves, as they have a right to. The drawback is their children copy them and learn to think well of themselves before they have made their right. I believe Cissie Rouse thought she was the only one in this parish who could talk to George on his level, who had the same sort of political mind. And at the start, anyhow, George was a lot more interested in his big prattle than in her femaleness.

"I had it from Mrs. Greenball at the shop that George was partial to the new infants' teacher and that was a sign that the Church people were talking. Edie Board had told me long before that George was growing fonder and fonder of meetings, —and meetings for two in especial.

"I was very polite to both ladies. I told Mrs. Greenball I was fond of the new school-teacher myself and had had her in for a cup of tea; I wasn't like a lot of better-placed people in the parish and reckoned a working-girl had no need of human kindness. That drew the blood to Mrs. Greenball's face. But I was fond of the girl. I liked her pluck, though I thought her knowing hungry look didn't

go well with her fresh colouring. I suppose it was that knowing look that took her to Chapel sometimes. The parson had to be broadminded enough to allow it. She had the same way home as George and me as far as the school, when it was wet and we couldn't use the field path. And as I said to Edie Board, George was not going home by North End, five miles round, when I was not at Chapel, rather than be seen in company with the young woman.

"Still, I dropped a word in George's ear. I said there was a muck-heap of lousy minds in every village and in every town, and Dodnash was no exception. George said a queer thing to me: that he had to have the help of a woman before an idea was born in his mind. I prayed him to tell no such tale, but he declared his mind did not light up and know its own strength in men's company. Well, I granted that might be, but meantime we were in Dodnash and Dodnash clack would very soon ruin his character and Cissie's school job. He was angry, but he took my point.

"I was satisfied. I knew, from what he was like with myself, that George had not many bodily needs. Ever since he was out of the clumsy stage, he had been thinking about the right and wrong of all in heaven and earth. And if you say he was lop-sided, too little of flesh and blood, I shan't contradict. It's what I thought myself and what made me believe he was safe from foolery. I had hated his lop-sidedness once on a time and tried to get

him to the Hippodrome. But it didn't work, and I had come to the conclusion that it was his nature to be lop-sided, as thousands of men are. I did not consider Miss Rouse had a real hold of his mind. She was new. He had to talk politics wherever a willing ear offered. She was smart; she nipped in and out of things like a clever she-terrier. But at that stage George was religious; the commandments were commandments to him. And as he told me when we were talking about the young woman together, his poor youth had taught him that smartness was not much help to the world of need."

"Then why . . .?" Maria broke in.

"I'm talking of four years ago," responded Arabella. She blew out her working candle and rubbed the soil from her fingers and came to the fire as if she had suddenly grown old and cold. "The talk died away four years ago because what I thought was true,—George looked on Cissie Rouse as a clever young miss, and nothing more." And then Arabella added: "But like a fool, I lost sight of the main truth: there was never a fixed idea of right and wrong in George, only the desire for what was glorious in heaven and earth. And last spring when a new idea of what was glorious had grown up in him, the game began again."

"It took three years for the love seeds to sprout in him?" Maria demanded incredulously.

"If seeds are the wrong depth, they'll lie dormant for years," declared Arabella. "And last March I began to think George was turned into a

hare. He would laugh to himself for no outward reason; glare at me without seeing me; make a fuss of me in a whirlwind and leave me alone suddenly as if he had been petting a toad.

"George swore there was nothing wrong; and perhaps there was nothing wrong at that time. But word went round that Miss Rouse had put in for a transfer and did not want to spend all her life teaching infants in a dead and alive village. On the face of it, it looked as if she could not be in love with anybody in Dodnash. But I wondered to myself whether she was afraid something might be a trouble to her if she stayed. She was a young woman who could look after herself.

"But the Education people did not see fit to move her. Very likely Mrs. Harris put a spoke in Cissie's wheel and reported she must grow some more character before she was promoted.

"The first scandal-mongering must have taught them cunning; nobody in Dodnash saw them meet, or even look warm-eyed at each other. Cissie had enough money for a bicycle, and she went home to Bournebridge from the Friday night to the Sunday afternoon. You recollect Mrs. Harris would not have her ride back on the Monday morning and then try to teach.

"So it was easy for George when he was in on a Saturday to take his cart to the far side of Bournebridge where not a soul knew him or worried about him . . ."

"But George worried?" Maria propounded.

"I often wonder over the time they had together," said Arabella. "I could almost pity them. George is sitting in gaol now, but I don't believe he is as tortured now as when he was carrying on behind my back. He didn't like telling me he had been to his club. He hadn't Cissie's clear head. And it was vain for her to stuff him with the talk of a wonderful world where everybody should have the sort of wife that was right for them. His Old Scriptures have a piece about getting rid of a barren woman. But George had too much of the white-robed doctrine in him and he liked to be glorious in everything and in respect of everybody.

"Still, they must have enjoyed themselves all last spring and summer. Because George is the sort that flares easily. And I dare say it made her feel good to know she was lifting him to the mountain-tops.

"But when you get that high up, things happen that make you anxious afterwards. Cissie was twenty-four, old enough to know that such flaring could not last in George, and she was not the sort to yield once she had her claws on a man. She settled that she and George were a pair."

"Did George think so?" Maria asked solemnly. She was beginning to understand the reason why Cissie Rouse came to an untimely end.

"He did not know what to think." Arabella was as solemn. "He knew she was good for him in one way and not in another. And he had me already,—good for him in one way and not in another. And

above all was duty; duty after the fun was over. And the mixture of facts tore his brain to bits.

"I can see the days going past, and tears and disputes between the two of them and nothing settled. And latterly the young woman must have tried to force his hand and made him meet her in the woods round here. So that gossip should force George to give way to her. And as you know, they were seen going towards their meeting-place. But she misjudged George; gossip did not scare him."

CHAPTER XII

"I DID not hear the truth of things through Edie Board or through Mrs. Greenball this time. I had it straight from George's mouth, last October. It was a month later before the talk of the meetings in Tokenhall Woods got round.

"I could see George had something he wanted to confess to me. He kept opening his mouth and shutting it like a dying cock and looking at me sideways to see if I were in a good temper. Then one day I stood still and stared at him with fixed eyes. He began to wear a face of red guilt, and I said to him: 'So there is something wrong, George?' Meaning things weren't as they were in the spring.

"He looked as if he were going to cry. And yet it wasn't fear of me or pity for the young woman he had been messing about with. Not at that moment, at any rate. It was his own mind lashing him for having deluded himself. He had thought he was a man of principle and strong character, but he had found he was more flesh than spirit and his body terrified him.

"I asked him if that meant he had got Cissie Rouse into trouble, and he said yes.

"I knew by instinct what the answer would be, but all the same I felt done, put aside. I had not an angry word for him. I must have kept my face

to a marvel because he did not gather I was hurt and looked across to me hopefully. He said we must consider her case, Cissie's need.

"That unloosed something in me. I felt my mind come back and I said blunt-out that Cissie wasn't the first female who had burnt her fingers with a married man and she would not be the last. Was I expected to ask her to tea and kiss her because she had made a fool of my husband?

"George prayed me not to talk so rough. And I prayed him to talk sense. But of course he had about a thousand thoughts in his head and didn't know which to settle on. My temper was rising, and it rose all the more because I could feel him sitting in that chair and splitting hairs, one after the other: 'There's only one thing for it, George Cole,' I shouted at him.

" 'Oh!' He sat up as if I had shouted a marvel.

" 'Hanging on and hanging on. Nursing your ideas for months. Do you think I haven't seen? Do you think I have been amused? I have not. Your antics aren't the sort that amuse me.' I was frothing, I admit. But I wanted to hit him. I was cruel. I was all twisted and tormented, and if I could have broken him with my hands I would have. Broken him, like the stick he was.

"But the spasm went over and I said as calm as could be: 'We'll have a clean sweep, George Cole. You'll please me best if you walk upstairs and pack your things. You can find lodgings in Bournebridge.

And I don't mind coming with you to bring the cart back. Just to get rid of you at once.'

"You should have seen his face: 'I shan't go,' he said. 'It's my house, when all is said and done.'

" 'All right,' I said. 'Only you aren't the man to stand it when the neighbours begin to grin and when the small boys holloa a little ditty about Spouting Cole and the school-teacher. You'll be happier out of Dodnash.'

"He said he deserved all the scorn in the world and welcomed it.

" 'Oh, well, if you're going to have a feast of penitence, there's no more to be said.' I turned straight from him and went upstairs. I did not stand about in the bedroom pitying myself. I looked round and weighed what I would take. My brother Bob had come back home when Father died and I reckoned I could be useful to Bob till I found a place. I was not going to stop in the same house with a man who had given my rights away to another woman and begged me to favour her. I was not used to putting up with things like that.

"I went downstairs and out to the shed to get the tin boxes I had brought with me sixteen years before. It was dark, but I could always lay my hand on anything and I hadn't patience enough to light the lantern. George was sitting in his chair when I went out and he was sitting there when I came back with the first box. I dusted it over the doorstep and as I was carrying it in, he said: 'You're going off?'

"That was not worth an answer, but I waited to hear what he had for contrary. He murmured at me in regretfulness: 'I believe you know me better than Cissie.'

"I was struck by his mournfulness and his peculiar way of looking at his affair, but I put it down to selfishness and rapped back I hoped he would like the change-over.

"He got up and said I had cause to hate him, but it was his duty to abide by Cissie's ignorance.

" 'Oho!' I said. 'She's ignorant, is she?' "

"He had stopped liking her?" Maria questioned, and seemed to answer herself, for she wagged her head sagaciously.

"I would not go so far as that." Arabella was impartial. "He was scared of her; she was little-minded like a lot of clever people and she had been prodding at him for months. But I had to guess that, because he did not go on about her ignorance. He had something he must ask me before I went: if I would try for a divorce as a poor person so that he and Cissie could be married.

" 'Oh,' I said. I pretended I knew all about divorces for poor persons. 'We are back to the starting-point, are we? This is where I consider her, is it? Well, poor person or not, I know as soon as I touch lawyers I've to spend money. I can submit to being robbed, but I'll wait a long time before I rob myself.'

"George said he would be responsible for the cost.

"I felt as though I was in a nightmare; and George the silly in his shirt in the road. He did not trust her, yet she was twiddling him round her fingers like a bit of string; and trying to twiddle me as well. I asked him why he was so set on marrying her. He declared that Cissie believed in him and meant him to take his place as a professional speaker, but he would stand a poor chance if he were not regular in his home life.

"I could see that she had not compared his preaching of a new world to selling patent medicine. And I allowed that was where I had made my mistake; and perhaps the young woman's nature was better suited to his than mine. So I said to George I would see how much the divorce would cost a poor person. We had a little laid by for ill-health and old age, but I was never too anxious in my outlook.

"I went upstairs and packed, and George brought the other boxes in for me. But after I had been at it half an hour, I realized I should give Brother Bob a shock turning up at that hour of night. And, all ways, it was better to go in the morning. So I called downstairs to George to lay a bit of supper, as packing was tiring work.

"He had done as I bid when I came down. I told him to draw in, but he would not. He sat by the fire with his head down like a sick horse. I saw he had another fancy and told myself that Cissie Rouse was welcome to him; I had had my fill of his uneasy soul. I ate the better for thinking that.

But as I knew, I was not to escape hearing his trouble.

"He did not want to be a professional speaker; not for the present, and perhaps never. But Cissie had said there was to be no mistake about it; he was to use the pleasant tongue God had given him.

" 'It doesn't matter a lot what you say at street-corners, does it?' I jeered at him.

" 'I have never spoken to any soul, anywhere, anything but the clearest truth I know,' he answered me.

" 'Indeed?' I signified he had been to Chapel while he had been playing a double game with me.

" 'I had to keep up appearances; for her sake as well as my own,' he cried out. 'And since I went wrong with her, I have only had my Bible class. It did not seem wrong to tell old truths. But'—he looked at my face and I expect I showed my life was so much rubbish to me—'I can't look at you and see what I've done to you . . .'

" 'Oh, hold your tongue!' I said. 'For God's sake hold it!' Presently, when I was better, I told him he would soon forget what he had done to me. And have every right to go round the world telling people how they ought to go on. There was no sense in him going to pieces and dropping his work because of me.

" 'I believe in my power,'—George was always wordy when he had a sense of sin,—'as long as I believe in my truth. Cissie says divorce is clean and good. And it is more wicked to keep unlikes bound

together than to separate them. She believes we are more alike, she and me, than I do. And, anyhow, I was brought up to believe that the sufferings through being unlike helped to our final stature. But that's all here and there.' George tired of the argument as he must have tired of it many a time with her. He put his hand over his face so that I should not see too much of his mind or of his opinion of what he had got out of Cissie. His feelings worked in him and out of him. He cried out at me: 'I don't feel I can talk politics to anybody. What's the use of politics when you make a mess of your home yourself? I daren't tell people Christ's message of love; I should only be jeering at myself. If I had to stand up in front of people, I should tell them a funny story and tell them to laugh gently and go gently; for fear the bubble should burst and we'd see there was nothing.'

"I knew the man's mind was sick. I knew he had forgotten about Cissie's need. But it came over me that I was still needful to him; I wasn't so bigoted as she was. And I knew he was still needful to me. It was no good telling him to master his feelings; it would be months, perhaps years, before he came to that. If he had any more forcing, as Cissie had been forcing him and rightly from her standpoint, he would go all to pieces. I had not nursed him through his queer hours for sixteen years for nothing. I said: 'I shan't go in the morning, but I shall only unpack one box.'

"He looked brighter, but his relief did not last.

He said he would have to clear out,—he had made a mistake when he claimed the house. Cissie would not live here, though he refused to be a speaker. She believed in town life.

"Perhaps I made the mistake of my life in talking as I did, perhaps there would have been no Assizes for George if I had clung to my first idea of having a clean sweep. But you don't unloose after sixteen years without a struggle: 'You aren't going to marry Cissie,' I said. 'You know she is too much for you. She's on the surface, you're in the deeps. And there's something due to me.'

" 'Well?' He quickened when it came to showing small pity for Cissie.

" 'When there's three people in a muddle, three people get hurt,' I went on. 'You have lost your standing round here; I have lost mine. And between us two there'll always be a scar. But we know each other and know we can get along. You know you can't with her; so why go to her? There's no need. She has told you she may have a baby. She may, and she mayn't. If she is to have one, let her go away and you can do the paying. If she don't want the child when it comes, I will go and fetch it here and be a mother to it. And you can be sure that Cissie Rouse has enough knowledge to get on her feet again somewhere.'

"George could not believe that I would take the child and be fair to it, but I made him understand I should be almost happy to have it. So he said he would see Cissie."

CHAPTER XIII

Maria Porby swung the rocking-chair forward and landed on her feet alongside Arabella. She took Arabella's right arm in her two hands and said she had been quiet, or next door to quiet, for three hours and had learned a lot in consequence. Now she was going home to her old man and hoped Arabella would sleep well after having got rid of so many ancient thoughts.

Arabella admitted she felt like sleep, and certainly was more quiet in mind than she had been for days. And she was glad Maria had guessed the end of things.

Maria said she hated a tale that did not leave something to the mind. Take novelettes now, where the governess married the lord. You could fancy they lived happy ever after, as you were meant to fancy. Or you could amuse yourself by speculating how long before there was a burst-up on account of the lord being too much of a lord and the governess too much of a governess. But if she might be allowed a word at random, it seemed to her that Arabella and George had been a little childlike when they expected Cissie to give up everything, the baby into the bargain. Apart from Cissie's love for George,—and she was the sort that must love before she carried on with a man,—Cissie had

father and mother in Bournebridge; brothers and sisters perhaps, acquaintances at any rate, before whom she must keep a proud head. Cissie knew she might keep some respect if she turned up with the husband of a woman who did not know how to value him, but she would only be pitied, or worse, if she had to disappear for a time through messing about unsuccessfully. No, it was a mistake for Arabella to propose anything that meant a setback for the young woman; Cissie would not like popping up again, even in London, without an open record. Arabella should have sat tight and offered nothing. And made George do the same.

"You're forgetting," Arabella rejoined. "I've told you I have had my doubts as to the course I took with George's spirit. I wanted to smooth things out for good and all. And up to a point I wanted to be fair to her, as well as to him. I knew the blame was not altogether hers. George could believe anything and make her believe anything. He never would understand that his soul must be as lonely as every soul must be; and he could magnify his loneliness to get hold of her. No. If George was going to remain convinced she was no real help to him, it was only fair to ease her out of her trouble."

Maria shook her head like a profound judge. "You left it open. You ought to have fixed George's mind for him. I wager he was hum-ing and hah-ing to the last day; to the night Cissie died."

"I tell you it was beyond my power to fix his

mind," Arabella answered with a renewal of force. "I told him that night, just before he went out, I wanted to hear no more of it."

"You were all crazy. No wonder it came to what it did." Maria shivered and went to the door. "God be thanked my old man is a simple thickhead."

Arabella remained on the doorstep after Maria had waddled around the corner. She looked up at the heavens. The stars were plentiful in a whitish-blue sky. The darkness deepened nearer the earth. It was faintly like the night of Cissie's death, though the air was heavier then with January dampness and the earth darkness was more of a covering. But even so, this present night was so empty of life that it would be possible to carry a body from the yard to Swale Field without being disturbed. Both policeman and gamekeeper came more often from Tokenhall since the murder, but they could be dodged. Everybody had an idea of their time.

Still, there would be no more need of such a carrying in her life; she was done with strong hope.

She locked the door and got to bed. She slept better than she expected and rose the moment she came awake. The moment you lay and allowed yourself to slacken, the weak thoughts came pouring into your brain. She was glad she had two people's work to get through in the field.

Edie Board called to her as she came back to make ready for dinner; Edie was always on the spy. "You had a long palaver with Maria Porby

last night. Half-past eleven before she banged the gate going home."

Edie spoke warmly and yesterday's prying had gone out of her eyes and voice. "I felt like it, Edie," Arabella admitted, and then apologized for her preference in confidantes. "You know, there's something grandmotherly about Maria. She tempts you to talk, just as if you were a child."

"You're right," Edie agreed in a lavish way. "Maria believes she knows everything worth knowing. But she don't show it too boldly. I always have to put my word in, the minute I fancy I know better." Edie had a good look at her neighbour. "Ah, she's done you good. You don't look so foreboding this morning, Arabella."

Arabella wondered what the woman meant by saying she had looked foreboding up to to-day, but did not ask: she laughed instead. "I have heard say confession is good for the soul. So I must believe it now. And if I want any dinner, I must put my potatoes on."

"Farewell," Edie said. She was quite willing to turn back to her own door without asking a single question about the trial. It was not that she had realized that Arabella could only tell things when she felt in the mood for telling. Edie was glutted; Maria must have passed on a lot of juicy things during the morning. How George Cole had wavered between his two women,—that was the sort of thing that brought the bright sparkle to Edie's eyes.

Arabella told herself she did not mind Maria retailing a private talk. And when she had thought a little longer she was very grateful to Maria for retailing it. Maria had been suspicious herself till eleven o'clock last night; and though Maria was too good a friend to breathe her suspicions, Edie Board was sharp enough to scent the unspoken things in Maria and blab-mouthed to proclaim what she scented, even as far as Bournebridge. Oh, it was plain the woman might have ruined everything. The way she had tackled her yesterday afternoon and repeated her questions about George's guilt, in spite of snubs and rudeness, showed it had been a bad mistake to say nothing to anybody and to choke off gossip. People would not be denied. And it was a wonderful mercy that she had had Maria round and had made Maria see the death as the outcome of a struggle between George and Cissie. Yes, she had strengthened herself and her reputation by her talk with Maria last night.

CHAPTER XIV

She had never expected it to come to a struggle between herself and Cissie. And when it did come it was settled in a few minutes; a few seconds, it seemed in memory. But, in finer truth, with a fogged and wavering man like George, the struggle had been between her and Cissie from the beginning; George had been like a toy balloon answering the breath of both.

Some people would say it was pure luck that Cissie had not been seen or heard when she came up to the cottage that Sunday night, just before six o'clock. But there was not an atom of luck about it. The secrecy was due to the young woman's cleverness and boldness in her desire for George; even due to her desire not to dirty her Sunday shoes.

As she had told Maria Porby, George had been weighing the problem all Sunday through. He had been to Bournebridge with the cart the day before and no doubt had met Cissie somewhere. He was full of a new supply of compassion for the young woman, and after tea he started to argue that he and Arabella were older and stronger and better able to bear all things. She let him argue. It was plain to her that the young woman had taken the humble and helpless line with him. That was going

to pay her better than the strong forcing style. And suddenly Arabella said she did not want to hear any more of a matter that had been talked over a thousand times and was now going to be settled by some cheap trickery. As soon as George had fixed to go to the young woman, he was to go.

He dried up after that. But, of course, she could not leave well alone herself. She was wild to think the young woman was up to tricks. She burst out to George that he could make himself believe anything; or a dirty little slut could, for that's what the young woman was when her fine words were stripped from her. And if George did not know that common did as common was, he would find out when he had to go and hawk his gift of speech at the street-corner. But perhaps George Cole did not believe in faithful words any more; perhaps he wanted to be a noise.

George was stung because he turned in his chair and groaned.

"Grunting won't aid!" She could not leave him alone; she was too wound up. She felt he had poison in him; and he was the man she had made. "I'll tell you, George Cole," she flared at him, "I'd throw you out of the window to her, like an old bone. That's all the value you have come down to, after being the most respected independent little man in ten parishes. But for one thing. The little slut would not know how to handle an old bone. She'd drop it in such muck, it would

never be found again. And even my old bones are worth more than that to me."

George made an angry noise, as he was entitled to, and finished off by saying in a haughty way that she was forgetting how to be fair to Cissie's good sense.

"Good sense?" She looked at him. "If you think she's got it, you've worried yourself and everybody else for no cause for three months. I offered you a clean sweep, you know."

He had not a word for answer. He knew as well that night as he had known a hundred nights before, he was not made to live with a pushing sort of woman. He got up and put on his coat. He was more than an hour before Chapel time, but she knew, without being told, that he was off to pray and commune in some dark gateway. Some people might laugh at him for praying over a trouble he had been the cause of himself, but it would be a pity if all the world were as wise as 'some people.'

She had no more than cleared away the tea-things and put on the kettle for washing-up when there came a low knock at the door; the door to the yard and not the front road. She was in such a daze that she did not like going to show herself to anybody for a minute. Her head had begun to suffer under all the worry. But the knock came again, just as low as before, but sharper. It sounded queer. But the last person she expected to see when she opened the door was the person she did see—Cissie Rouse. The blood went to her head and she

put a hand on the door-jamb to prop herself. She said "Good evening," without knowing much what she said.

"Is Mr. Cole at home?" Cissie spoke firmly. She had a sort of raincoat on and a felt hat, as if she had come on her bicycle after getting out from Bournebridge.

The mention of George's name brought Arabella back to life; it wasn't a name for that young woman to use to her: "You ought to have met him; he's now gone to Chapel."

"But it's too soon." The young woman seemed to think she was lying and tried to look inside the house. And then she explained she did not meet George because she had come from the school through the fields, up Owlands path and round by the back across the orchard. There was enough talk without her being seen near Mr. Cole's.

"I've told you where he is gone. Hustle along the road and catch him." Arabella was not jeering; she was warning the young woman to be off out of danger.

Cissie's face moved a little back into the darkness at the quality of Arabella's voice, but she was too strung-up to have any sense, too excited by her own ideas to talk naturally. She might have been rebuking one of her infants by the way she started on Arabella again: "I think it would be a lot better if I talked to you. It's you . . ."

"I know all a slut can say," Arabella cut in at once. "I'm not so ignorant. I've planned three years

ahead in respect of four acres for sixteen years. I know every word, every word in a slut's noddle." She pulled the door over to shut it, but the young woman stuck her foot in the way. Arabella gasped at her: "Take it out."

"I'm not in the least frightened, either by your voice or by your manners," the piping young voice declared. "I have come to warn you, and I mean to warn you. I know I have been to blame. But not so much as you. You have sat on his natural instincts for sixteen years. And if you go on doing it much longer, he will commit suicide."

Cissie Rouse did not say another word on earth. It must have taken a good deal of courage and faith to get so far. For Arabella had flung the door wide again and had stepped towards the young woman with reaching hands. Or perhaps it was ignorance that kept her tongue going. Cissie could not read Arabella's face with the light coming from behind, and if she ought to have sensed Arabella's madness and its blind fury, she may not have believed in blind furies and never before been in contact with a possessed soul. Certainly she forgot that Arabella Cole had worked like a man all her life and had the strength of steel in her fingers. So that Arabella's hands had closed on her throat before she realized she was going to be killed. And then the realization paralysed her.

Arabella made a half-spring and brought the young woman to the ground in the middle of the yard. The white face beneath her might have been

a piece of paper with black dots on it. Cissie had a thin scarf round her neck and Arabella could mutter as she twisted it that it was silly to go about with a thing like that in the winter. But otherwise nothing altered or relaxed in her mind until she felt the life was wholly out of her enemy and until the foolishly plucking hands fell away from her own.

She rose and left the body where it lay. The oblong of light beckoned her and she crossed the threshold and sat down on the polished chair near the door. Presently she shut the door, but she had to sit down again at once. She did not care if all the world came pouring into the yard to stare and to shout murder. She could not move. She was spent.

CHAPTER XV

It was a dreadful thing to have done; terrible, the last thing in the world she could have wished to have done. It was almost comic to think that if babbling old Mother Cole had been alive, it would not have been done. She would not have paddled off to Church as yet and her presence would have made all the difference; divided the mind, so to say.

The act had loaded her mind for ever. As George might have said, she had come to the second birth, but she had not been re-born into the sort of eternal life he pictured. It was strange and mad to think like that; it was not natural with a human being, the remains of a human being, less than ten yards away. But it was the young woman's fault. If she had not been too conceited to take warning, if she had not stood there on the doorstep so rock-fast in her knowingness, her everlasting tuppenny knowingness, there would have been no need to cry out now against a sudden immovable burden of ugliness.

Yet her spirit stirred exultantly. The enemy was dead; stilled. There was no weight on the mind, but a strange feeling of lightness and ease where a weight had been. She and George would not be

two poor muddled fools any more. Better to have done a sky-astounding thing than live like that.

She put triumph away from her; it was as silly as excuses. She must do something; go outside again. Then she saw that the water in the kettle was steaming away to nothing and must have been for some time. Was she to wash up first? Suppose somebody came? Suppose George came back for some reason or other?

Well, George and the world could find out if they liked. She would go herself to Tokenhall and tell the police if it were not a four-mile walk there. She would not take so much trouble for Cissie Rouse, live or dead. There were more important things than Cissie Rouse. Washing-up was more important.

But the young woman was going to give more trouble dead than alive. She must be moved. If there was to be a noise, and there was bound to be, sooner or later, it need not start on Arabella Cole's doorstep. It was an ill bird that fouled its own nest.

As soon as the dishes were ranged on the dresser, Arabella went to the door and listened. The Church bell was on the last five minutes' toll. The roads would be emptying of Church- and Chapel-goers. And presently the pub-goers would begin to move,—the Board boys next door, for one lot. But they had more wisdom than pass through her yard and orchard on the way to the 'White Horse,' even on the darkest night.

She had the feeling that she knew where every-

body was in the village, and closed her door and stepped towards the heap on the ground. She stood stiffly and reckoned that Cissie would be about nine stone. That was a good deal less than a sack of oats, and not such a clumsy weight to handle if she brought the arms over her own shoulders. Not many people would credit her with the strength to lift nine stone clear of the ground, much less carry it several hundred yards.

But it was one thing to drag sacks of potatoes from point to point in the field and quite another to march about the world with a solid and overpowering weight on one's back. She was not so strong as she had boasted to herself and her heart was well-nigh bursting when she dropped to the grass in the orchard. She had no idea where she would bestow the body, but meant to go as far as she could along the one secret line of retreat from her yard. She must not swing to the right through Square Acres,—that was the field next to the orchard. Bearing right would bring her to the Owlands footpath and somebody might be hanging about there; a courting couple or the Hagley menfolk waiting for company to the 'White Horse.'

She pulled her burden on her back and staggered on again. It was an easy gap from the orchard into Square Acres; she and George often used it when they went to the shop. Square Acres was a clover layer and true walking all over, but she hugged the darkness of the left-hand fence until she dropped for the second time. She must have

grown a little dizzy and fuddled because she started to talk to Cissie and to tell her that though death had increased her power she was still too weak to conquer Arabella Cole. And she laughed in a silly fashion when she declared that Cissie's clack would never poison George Cole again.

The firm soil of the field was clammy to the fingers and the short-stalked clover leaves were as damp as could be. But Arabella did not hurry. She was able to get up, but she wanted all her strength back,—to feel that she could play with her burden over the next stage. For the gap into Swale Field led across a seven-foot ditch,—the ditch that took off the water from her own field. It would not be seemly or safe to dump the body in the ditch. That would point everybody's nose to the Potash Lane cottages.

The ditch was worse than she expected. She knew the knack of going down and across and up as well as she knew how to get into her own bed. But the weight on her back spoilt her balance on the greasy clayish incline. She twisted suddenly as she fell and shot her burden on to the other bank of the ditch. She landed in the bottom of the ditch herself, but all her thought went to save the body from slipping down. She clutched and pushed, though her boots were full of water and though her back was half paralysed. The darkness helped to steady her frenzy. She had to go slow to take a proper grip of Cissie.

It would have been a release from torment to

have left the body at the top of the ditch and to have gone home and collapsed. But that would not do; there was no sense attached to this particular spot.

Swale Field was ploughed up and she must not set one foot on that tell-tale soil. But, thanks be, Tanpodder's ploughmen had not cut in too close to the hedge. There was a walking level of rough grass along under the steep old bank with its bramble bushes and ash trees. Praise be, Tanpodder was one of the sleepy farmers and believed in keeping plenty of cover for game,—and for other things. This was the proper direction and the proper cover. The fence curved towards the School Road, and if Cissie were found in some of the bushes about twenty or thirty yards from the road gate, anybody, any half-crazy man might have done the deed while Cissie was wandering about after tea. Yes, and anybody was nobody.

Arabella could not make herself travel as far as she had planned. But when she collapsed on the bank on the fringe of some bushes she realized she was in an angle of the fence about a hundred yards from the road. It would do; it would have to do. She would lose control of herself if she tackled her burden again. And maybe a crazy man would carry his victim a hundred yards; a man could do a sixth of what she had done.

She did not try to examine Cissie. It was hopeless in the sombre darkness. The young woman's hands had grabbed weakly at her own scarf during

the last part of the struggle. And there was too much old grass and withered weed on the nearer bank of the ditch for the raincoat to be very much soiled.

While Arabella was reckoning her good fortune, her ear caught the sound of boots and of voices along the School Road. She ducked to the body before she remembered that the darkness and the curve of the fence screened her. One voice had the high twang of young Sprake's from Tanpodder's corner. He and his mate were off to the tavern for a drink. And it was time she was going home to peace and quiet; she was entitled to it.

Her Sunday skirt had never been in such a mess since she made it, and her boots would not take a polish before morning, if then. She had only just begun to lay the supper when George came in. But if she did not look much at him, he did not look much at her. He was sunk in his thoughts and a lot calmer than when he went out. She put it down to Chapel, but after he had finished his bread and cheese and the lettuce from the frame, he began to say he had prayed and meditated so long that he was late for service. But light had come to him; he must go to Cissie, to the one who had more need of help.

It was a shock to hear Cissie talked about as though she were still alive, and Arabella almost yelled out triumphantly that there was no cunning young woman for him to go to. But as soon as she had mastered that noisy instinct, she felt done.

Though Cissie was out of the way, the reflection on George's character was the same, made her deed almost worthless. No man of character, whatever his lapses, would decide to bind himself for ever to a young woman who would force him to live a cheap life. But anything that looked like self-sacrifice always robbed George of his common sense. He was weak, and it was her dread of his weakness that had made her go for Cissie like a tigress. She had to protect George; there was something good and fine at the bottom of him, somewhere, and she had to save that.

George did not know what to make of her hard-faced silence; he had expected her to flare out again, not knowing there was no need for her to flare any more. He began to plead with her and to hope she would not make any unnecessary talk in the village. Cissie could give in notice to leave because the school people would not transfer her or promote her. That would save her face in Dodnash and in Bournebridge as well. So perhaps Arabella would not mind hanging on for a week or two.

As soon as George spoke, Arabella decided it would be unwise of her to leave the village abruptly. When he went on with his careful and unnecessary planning for Cissie's reputation he became like a silly, timid child to her. Had he no sense of what had gone out of her life because of his decision, even if he knew nothing of other terrible things?

"I shall write to my brother Bob to-night," she stated rigorously. "And ask him if he can have me till I find a job somewhere. I shan't hear for a few days. And then I'll set a few days before I come. I shall put it about here I am going off for a holiday."

George was grateful and got the inkpot and the notepaper while she washed up in the back place. When she had written to Bob, she declared she was more than ready for bed if George would please to move himself. He answered that he would sit awhile longer by the fire. She nodded. She knew he would be down on his knees presently. Perhaps it was more tactful than praying about Cissie and himself upstairs in her company, but why had he so much feeling in the little things and none in the big? As she lay in bed she wondered how she had got through sixteen years with such a man; with a wander-wit, for ever fluttering off after this idea and that idea. Was he good? Was he fine? Or just good and fine enough to delude other people and make them ruin their lives for him? She almost laughed out to the darkened bedroom. Her mind set like steel against George, and though she slept, the rigour did not go out of her brain.

CHAPTER XVI

The Monday morning was misty and drizzly. It looked like being one of those sad days that have not the heart to improve and dwindle out into darkness at about three in the afternoon. Arabella had slept all night in a heavy fashion and her mind was still heavy when she got up. She found she had automatically decided to go on as usual until the noise began about Cissie, and though she felt some anxiety as to the result of the noise, she had companioned a faithless man for many months and knew how to rule her fears and to cover their insubordination with a quiet face.

She and George loaded up the cart and he was off to Bournebridge by a little past seven. She went out into the field to look at the sticky soil. Her back was stiff and her spirit was overstrained by the experiences of the previous evening, and she was quick to decide she would do no good with a spade in such weather. The stored stuff wanted overlooking very badly and the loft of the shed with its good dry smell of potatoes and beetroot would suit her down to the ground.

Meanwhile she put her house straight. Her Sunday boots had been in the stove oven overnight and took a beautiful polish. Indeed, they looked all the better for their souse in the ditch. She had al-

ready noticed there was not a trace of the struggle on the hard surface of the yard; neither hatpin nor hairpin.

Arabella had put all thoughts of her conquered enemy away from her until she was fetching the second battered pail that she used for dirty work out of the front garden. She caught sight of Mrs. Beales from the school-house at Edie Board's door, and Mrs. Beales at that time of the morning, half-past nine, meant that Cissie had been missed.

Arabella made as if she had not seen Mrs. Beales and went up to the loft to her picking-over job. An hour and a half later by her belt-watch she heard Edie Board come racing round the corner of the yard and knock vainly at the house door. Edie was so excited that she rattled the door knob till Arabella stepped over to the loft lattice and called down pretty sharply against the abuse of her door handle.

"Eh! You're up there!" Edie was quite annoyed, as if her neighbours ought always to be on the spot for her news. And when she had climbed up to the twilight of the loft, Edie stuck her elbows out and declared it was a funny day that did not suit Arabella Cole for something.

Arabella gave her the question she was waiting for; whether she had run enough to burst a blood-vessel to tell Arabella Cole that Arabella Cole was busy. Indeed, Arabella was rather scornful of the malevolent but futile time-squandering prattler.

"You ain't heard?" Edie noted the scorn, but she could live and enjoy herself in spite of scorn.

"How should I have heard?" Arabella bantered her.

"I dunno!" Edie's voice began to sing. "Mrs. Beales now been up. Mrs. Harris, the schoolmistress, don't want it known for fear the children should talk. But Cissie Rouse never came home last night."

"Ah!" Arabella was surprised, and then asked in a dry voice: "And where do they reckon she found a bed?"

"Eh?" Edie was surprised by that question; she had taken it for granted that Arabella would think something bad. "I dunno where she got to; nor anybody else." Edie was sad to be uninformed on that point, but she soon brightened to the details she did know: "Cissie bicycled out from Bournebridge yesterday afternoon, the same as usual. And she had tea with Mrs. Harris, the same as usual. Except,"—Edie dropped her voice impressively,—"Mrs. Beales said Mrs. Harris and Cissie had words. Oh, very high words, Mrs. Beales said. And according to Mrs. Beales, Cissie went out almost directly after tea. They all went to bed as usual, and Mrs. Harris left the door on the latch, as she's had to do before for Cissie. But Cissie was not down to breakfast this morning. And when Mrs. Harris called Mrs. Beales into her room at nine o'clock, just on school time, Cissie's bed had

not been slept in nor her nightgown unfolded, and the bedroom was empty."

"Well, I never!" said Arabella. She was glad the loft was dim.

"Ah!" Edie triumphed. And then she strove to find a neat way of bringing in George Cole's name. "Mrs. Beales called here just now on the way to the vicarage. Mrs. Harris told her to . . ."

"Why did Mrs. Harris tell her to call here?" Arabella took fire at the profound suggestiveness in Edie's voice.

"Oh, my dear!" Edie was flustered for a moment, but for no longer. She took the opening. "I won't hide it from you. There's been talk . . ."

"You surprise me," said Arabella defensively.

"You mustn't mind my repeating it." Edie liked repeating it, now that Arabella Cole had realized it was no use flying out in a temper. "You know I told you about Tokenhall Woods and Cissie being seen there with your George when you thought he was at his club? Well, folks are saying it was no lie; and George did meet her there more than once. Mrs. Beales said that was what the words were about between Cissie and Mrs. Harris last night. And Mrs. Beales called in here on her way to the parson to know if your George was still at home."

In spite of her anger against George, Arabella asked herself fiercely why the village tongue should be so loud against him, and she asked Edie just as fiercely if George were ever at home on a

Monday, a Wednesday, or a Saturday? Didn't the whole village know his delivery days?

"But he might have gone off with the young woman last night, after Chapel," Edie protested on behalf of Mrs. Beales and Mrs. Harris. "Seeing how things were, and how she didn't come home last night."

"You saw him go off at seven." Arabella roused more and more for George. "I loaded up Brussels sprouts, eggs, a dressed chicken, potatoes, celery and whatnot with him. And we did not put in a young woman, to my knowledge."

"That isn't to say he won't meet her to-day in Bournebridge." Edie shifted her ground to be equal to her sarcastic neighbour. "Going off as usual isn't to say he will come home as usual. That it isn't."

"He isn't crazy." Arabella sounded cool, but she had lost control of herself.

"No. But you're crazy." Edie allowed herself to speak her mind. Whatever the state of affairs, she had a chance to wound Arabella Cole. Her voice rose shrilly. "You always were the bottiest woman in Dodnash, just because your husband had the gift of the gab. But maybe you'll begin to learn something to-day,—that other folks have got as much sense as you have. And a bit more, perhaps. If you had paid any regard to my warnings, you could have kept your husband. You wouldn't have been left. But you knew better; you always did know better." Edie lifted her lip. "I'll tell you the last words Cissie Rouse said to Mrs. Harris last night,

and then perhaps you'll come awake. 'You needn't worry, Mrs. Harris,' said Cissie. 'I know perfectly well what I'm doing. Everything will be straightened out by this time to-morrow.' And on top of what Mrs. Harris had said to Cissie, that meant Cissie was going to see your George last night and make him go off with her." And then Edie demanded triumphantly: "What else could it mean?"

Arabella had never expected to be frightened by Edie Board, but the woman's positiveness made her heart go chill. She laughed, but it was not a full-sounding laugh. "We'll see what it means when George comes home."

Edie was all warm and pleasant; Arabella Cole had had to take the loss of her husband as a joke. And if her husband were not lost there was trouble waiting for him. "If your George does come home, Mrs. Harris has allowed for it. Cissie may have gone a bit light-headed last night. She has been funny in her ways for some time. And she may have wandered off and hid herself to scare people. Women in her state do queer things. And Mrs. Beales is to ask the parson to keep a look-out, and if your George is seen coming back from Bournebridge, the parson is to send a wire to Cissie's father whether she has walked home. And if the answer is not all it should be, the parson is to get into touch with the policeman at Tokenhall."

"I see!" Arabella did see. She had been very simple last night. The affair was not going to remain a simple battle between her and Cissie Rouse.

The gossips of the village were interfering. She derided the gossips: "So the old wives' Parliament of Dodnash has taken charge! And sent orders to the parson!"

"You may be too inhuman to meddle!" Edie was off again in indignant righteousness. "But other folks have got feelings. Ah, the poor dear young thing may be perishing."

"The poor dear young . . ." Arabella could not stand that whimpering favouritism, but realized in time that she must be careful. She must make the gossips think of something else besides the wickedness of George Cole. She smiled: "You're forgetting yourself, Edie."

"Oh, am I!" Edie resented the idea.

"You and me have known many a girl go wrong, as the saying is, Edie. Many a one, younger than Cissie, and I can't recall one that perished." Arabella invited Edie's better memory, but Edie had to allow that Cissie Rouse was making a lot of fuss over herself; though it was Edie Board who was making the fuss.

Arabella shook a flattering head. "You've said time and again, Edie, that Cissie was eaten up by her own cleverness. It's natural to get excited when young women don't come home to bed. But if you had recollected your opinion you'd have told Mrs. Beales and Mrs. Harris and the parson to inquire at the railway station, and telephone as far as Inningswood Station, too."

"Whatever for?" Edie asked scornfully; but she

was tempted by the chance of telling three people what they ought to have done.

"To ask if Cissie had stepped into the London train last night," said Arabella coolly. "It's no good wrapping it up now; she tried to get hold of my George and couldn't. Her noise to Mrs. Harris last night was all eyewash. And you can take my word she knew it."

"But she wouldn't have gone off so sudden," protested Edie.

"Not after Mrs. Harris had let fly at her loud enough for the Beales family to hear?" Arabella asked judicially. "She could have given notice,—and had the school children sniggering at her for a week. They aren't such dull children as not to pick up all the spice in the village."

"But to leave no word? And her clothes and her bicycle." Edie was not going to give up her own gaudy picture of Cissie Rouse for a less gaudy one. Arabella went back to her potato-sorting as if the whole episode were too simple to waste more time upon. She did not even look up at Edie as she made her final explanation. "Temper took her off, my dear. It's the clever people that feel it most when they've made fools of themselves. They get into the habit of reckoning that what they say must be, as a matter of course. Cissie Rouse will write for her things in a day or two."

"I wonder." Edie could not deny that Arabella's explanation was true to human nature, but she

went sadly from the loft. She did not like flat truths.

Arabella sighed to herself over the lies she had told. She had given the tongues another theme for an hour or two, perhaps for a day or two. It was scarcely worth the trouble. But that was how she must go on now; she must buy peace and security for George and herself from minute to minute, just as best she could.

George came home at a little before one; he was always slower on the round than she was. He looked easy; no doubt he had worked out all he would say to Cissie in the evening. But it was also evident that nobody had stopped him and told him of the disappearance, and he had not noticed anyone looking at him with a queer expression. Still, it was no use smothering the news; that would be unnatural. When he had had his dinner Arabella said to him in a gossipy way: "I must tell you, George, Mrs. Beales was up here this morning. And Cissie Rouse is missing."

"Missing?" George was astounded. All the sense had gone out of his plan to go off with the young woman.

Arabella chatted on: "There's as much prattle as you'd expect. Mrs. Beales and Mrs. Harris and Mrs. Board and the parson are going to wire to Cissie's father and then they'll have the policeman from Tokenhall. They all say Cissie was a bit light-headed last night and wandered away somewhere."

"She had cause to be light-headed." George

stood up, out of all control. "I'm going to look for her. Now."

"Are you going to swallow the old women's gossip like everybody else?" Arabella asked with a resignation she did not feel. "Where's the need for you to leave your work and run about like a chicken? She may well have taken the train to London. She had a row with Mrs. Harris."

"She would not take the train. She promised to meet me to-night. When I saw her on Saturday." George soon countered her argument.

So Cissie had gone beyond her intentions when she came up to the cottage last night. But George was at the door with his hat on: "Take your greatcoat," she bade him sharply. And while he was dressing himself properly she warned him, hoping vainly to keep his name out of the talk: "You can bear this in mind. In one respect you made up your mind too late, when you made it up last night. All your traffic with Cissie is on everybody's tongue now she has disappeared. And you're a very filthy fellow amongst a lot of snow-white angels."

"It can't be helped," said George.

"It can't," Arabella agreed emphatically. "But don't go asking everybody if they have seen her. Not even your Chapel people."

"I've brought shame on Chapel." George condemned himself harshly. "I must call and see Sulyer while I'm out."

Her face went grey with despair. Sulyer's servants would soon put it round the village that

George Cole felt himself responsible for Cissie Rouse's disappearance. But she could just as soon stop the rain from falling as hinder George Cole when he was full of penitence.

He excused himself: "I must save Sulyer what I can. I don't want him to think I have brought shame on his congregation lightly and wilfully."

"All right." Arabella shut the door as he stepped off. She had been childish to try and separate his name from Cissie's. It did not matter what he did now. Nothing, not even the rumour of an escaped lunatic, would clear George and Arabella Cole of some sort of connection with the death of Cissie Rouse,—when it was discovered.

While the afternoon wore away she pondered whether she had been wise to deposit the body in Swale Field, whether she ought not to have buried it somewhere, whether she could not do something with it this evening as soon as darkness came. She did not want her life or George's life destroyed because of a senseless and impudent young thief. But if they were to be, they were. She could not tackle that body again in cold blood; she was not scared enough of death by hanging for that.

It was long after dark when George came home, wet through and glad of his bed as soon as he had eaten. He had not found Cissie in the Tokenhall Woods as he had expected. But Sulyer had dressed him down for a couple of hours on end, had made hay of all his excuses and made him feel for the

first time in his life that there was iron as well as glory in Chapel notions.

George seemed almost glad to be dressed down. But Arabella's heart was hot. It was a bit late in the day to bring out the iron in Chapel notions. Though she did not complain so much of that,—a man ought to be trounced for making a fool of himself with a woman. But Sulyer seemed to be on the same level as Edie Board. She gleaned from George that his Chapel leader had not had a word of blame for the young woman who had made wreck of sixteen years of thought and care and of a man's slow growth into honest usefulness.

Well, if the mob of Sulyers and Edie Boards were ready to spring as soon as they found out that the victims of Cissie Rouse had known how to deliver themselves from her torment, she, Arabella Cole, meant to be ready for them when they did spring . . . as ready as she could be.

CHAPTER XVII

Mr. Tanpodder found the body, or rather Mr. Tanpodder's dog did. Arabella had the news from Edie Board; Edie had it from Greenball's shop-boy within five minutes of the shop-boy's call at Tanpodder's on the Tuesday morning. The shop-boy left groceries at Tanpodder's and a stone of dross wheat at Edie's for her chickens. And when Edie had collected the Potash Lane women she led them through Cole's orchard towards the corpse in Swale Field. That showed how rapt out of herself Edie was, but even so she dared not trespass without asking leave.

She left her party standing out of sight and came to the field gate and called for Arabella to come over to her. It was a fairish day, and though the soil was still rather sticky Arabella had settled that the digging must be got on with every passable morning, especially when George was at home.

George took notice of Edie first and went towards her, but Edie beckoned him back and shouted for Arabella to come alone. George stepped back to the trench as solemn as could be, and said while Arabella was scraping her boots on the spade: "I expect there's news of her; bad news."

"Oh, go on!" Arabella heartened him. "That clack of a woman would make a row about the

moonrise if she thought anybody would listen to her. You keep digging till I come back."

When she got across the gate, Edie had it open invitingly: "They've found her," she burst out. "We're going across to see her. I'm sure you don't mind our going through the orchard in a case like this."

"Regular party, you've got." Arabella had an unfavourable eye on the group of women waiting under the bare trees. Mrs. Hagley and Mrs. Leip were there, as well as Maria Porby and Susy Davy. "Whatever's up?"

"She's dead," said Edie, as full of sorrow as the church bell. "Dead as a door-nail," she added a bit brighter. "Murdered," she sighed in ineffable content, knowing instinctively that her days were permanently enriched.

"Cooh!" said Arabella, and then she came over a little faint. "Poor dear!" She meant her pity; Cissie ought to have weighed her body strength before she backed her brain strength.

Arabella looked towards George, but she thought it wiser not to let him into the news while he was in the field with neighbours near. He might make a lot of noise. And Edie seemed to look vengefully at him.

They went over to the other women and five tongues dinned the tale into Arabella's ears. Mr. Tanpodder had been on his walk round the farm after breakfast. He had not been over his ploughs for long enough and thought it was time he took

the feel of them again. His dog was with him or he would never have come within a hundred yards of Cissie. The dog took ahead while his master was in Corner Field and strayed as far as Swale Field fence in the hopes of a rabbit. And then it started barking and growling as if it was mad. Mr. Tanpodder called it to heel, but the dog would not budge. And something in the bark took Mr. Tanpodder across to see what was the matter. Nothing as far as he could see from his side of the fence. He told the dog not to be silly and come on, but the dog wouldn't. And, lo and behold, when Tanpodder blundered through the fence to give the dog a bit of stick, Cissie Rouse lay there staring up at the sky.

The remarks on that part of the tale lasted till the party came to the gap over the ditch. And it was a job and a half to get old Susy Davy and short-legged Maria up the slope. There were no sharp markings from Sunday night on account of Monday's drizzle, and what traces there were the party soon trampled out of existence.

The tale went on as the women proceeded single file along the grass border of Swale Field ploughland. Mr. Tanpodder had wasted no time. He stepped back home by the road and told his wife. Then he called Old Sprake, his horseman. It was no young man's job, according to Mrs. Tanpodder. And Sprake had had orders to get a cart and some sacks. Sprake was a slow goer, but there was no knowing how long that shop-boy had stood about

the road gossiping, and if everybody did not hurry more than they were hurrying, there would be no body to be seen.

Susy Davy hoped there wouldn't be any body to be seen. And when Edie asked the old lady why she had come along then, Susy was quite flummoxed.

When they rounded the bend, Edie, who was in front, cried out that Mrs. Tanpodder and her old maidservant were standing at the spot on guard. So they were in time. But they were not. There was only the dry pressed bit of ground where Cissie had lain, to stare at. Mrs. Tanpodder and her servant were having a low-voiced chat together; that was all they were doing. Cart-wheel tracks and great horse-sploddings showed that Old Sprake had been quick for once in his life.

Edie Board grew red and furious. "This won't do," she yelled out in front of everybody. "Not by a long chalk it won't. Whatever the police'll say! They'll have something to say to Mr. Tanpodder, I bet a sovereign."

Mrs. Tanpodder did not take offence, though Edie aimed at her. She was a stout kindly woman with a soft voice: "I came with Mr. Tanpodder to see if it was really too late to help,"—and they all noticed Mrs. Tanpodder had a small bag in her hand,—"but she was quite gone. And Mr. Tanpodder said, and I agreed with him, as the police haven't showed up yet, it was better to move the

body away from the eyes of grown-ups and children alike."

Maria Porby's eyes danced when Mrs. Tanpodder got home on Edie like that, but Edie had read too many murder accounts to be put down. "You mark my words, ma'am," she said with her lips together, "there'll be trouble over this. You could have put sacks over, against the children. The police will say so."

"You're quite right," said Maria Porby,—and Arabella wondered why Maria was so open in jeering at Edie this morning; it was against all Maria's principles to squabble with her next-door neighbour. "The police'll talk to Mr. Tanpodder. They'll let him know he ought to have left the body till Edie Board had looked her fill. She would have been entitled to pull the sacks off."

There was a grin at Edie. But Edie burst out that somebody must swing for it and it was to be hoped that the right one would. But he wouldn't, if they all stamped about like a lot of cart-horses. It did not sound as if Edie had been the one to bring everybody there.

Mrs. Tanpodder remarked that her husband did not think the strangling had been done in the field. The word made them silent, and then Edie said if the body had been carried to this spot, they must not stamp about on the land and bury the murderer's footprints, but all go back on the road at once, moving along the grass.

"You can spend your morning being a detective

if you like." Arabella had had enough of Edie's nonsense. "I am going home to my work. And I'm going the way I came."

The other women agreed with her, and then they seemed to remember things and stared at her as if she were suddenly quite outside their neighbourliness, rather like a panther in a horse-yard instead of the horses. Arabella was just about to ask what was wrong with them, when Mrs. Tanpodder said that Mrs. Cole was quite right and it was time they all went home and stopped dwelling on terrible things.

Maria Porby was as lively on the way back as the band after a soldier's funeral. Susy Davy went on about the ditch at the gap, but Maria said Susy and all of them were past the time of life when anybody got excited when they fell down and showed their unders. They all started joking about their young days and tried to include Arabella now and then by making hasty looks at her.

She did not want to be included and she was glad when she left the party to rejoin George in the field. Maria Porby broke away as well. She cackled and declared she wanted to see what the Coles had in the way of property, but the other women were not deceived; they knew Maria was siding with her friend and that her friend had need of support.

"You don't need to come, Maria." Arabella offered the polite cold shoulder.

Maria did not say a word till they were at the

gate into the field. Then she stopped Arabella and asked: "You're going to break the news to George now?" And when hesitation and resentment came into Arabella's eyes, Maria pointed to the small shed where they kept the tools during the daytime: "You got that bit of shelter. Draw him in there."

"What's the hurry?" Arabella had arranged to look after herself.

"You've a lot to do, my dear," said Maria in a kindly but insistent voice. "Your George was a quarter of an hour late for Chapel on Sunday."

"And if he was?" Arabella asked, but her contempt was not complete. Her neighbours' eyes had been full of insinuations as soon as they had been defrauded of the sight of the dead body.

"Your George has never been late for Chapel in his life, till Sunday last." Maria put up her hand and began ticking off the points on her stubby fingers. "Your George went looking for her yesterday; the only one to go. Parson did not spread the alarm till late, to keep Cissie's good name till the last. George was before the police."

"Putting up a clumsy blind, of course," scoffed Arabella.

"He went the direct opposite direction in which the body was found." Maria made that another point, and then her look hardened still more. "Edie Board had it all pat within ten minutes of hearing the news and put it aside till she had had your permission to cut through your orchard to the corpse.

And what Edie don't know about Cissie's determination to make you divorce George and make him marry her, love or no love,—well, Edie will take it up and swear to it."

"She ought to be in the police," said Arabella in a pleasant way. "She's got such a strong brain."

Maria's eyes narrowed to a smile: "Edie don't like murders; she might be murdered herself one day. And she's got to keep up the habit of taking revenge."

"Name o' God!" Arabella did not feel equal to that joke. "I don't know who's crazy: you or me, or George or Edie. All of us, no doubt. The body's been found, the Court of Law held and the Black Cap used, all inside an hour. Do you mean to say the police are going to be guided by village gossip? Are they going to stand round Edie Board with a notebook, like me taking down orders for vegetables? And touching their caps and saying: 'It shall be done, ma'am. Monday next for certain.' For the love of reason, Maria, come out with a little sense."

Maria shook her head. "You may know best, my dear. But you can't know what you haven't heard. And I heard Edie before we came along. Now Mr. Tanpodder has said the crime wasn't committed in Swale Field, Edie has gone home to work up evidence for it to be committed elsewhere. You may laugh at her, but she'll find it. And that evidence, and every word that George or Cissie or anybody connected with them has spoken, will be laid at

the foot of the police when they come; and, if not laid by Edie, by somebody she has routed up.

"You go across to George. You put him through his paces this minute. Make him account for every second of his life since five o'clock on Sunday evening. Cissie left the school-house then. It's for your own sake." Maria had tears in her eyes, and Arabella could not have believed the old dame liked her so much. But Maria knew the inside of things to a certain extent and said her last word to show she knew. "You've had a lot to put up with from George. And you may be tempted to think he isn't worth your trouble. But I know, and you know, your life is bound up with his, and will be to the end."

Maria went off and left Arabella to think it over.

Arabella did no thinking over. She was taken with a blind panic for George. She was helpless. She had said she would be ready when the mob of Edies leaped at her, but it had leaped before she was awake and had overpowered her already. Ah! It would be better to set off for Tokenhall police station now and give herself up. The ruin would only be worse if she waited; the law would only be more vengeful. The law would soon put its hand on George, or on herself,—it did not matter which,—and she had read enough in the newspapers to know that when the law took you for murder you were as good as hung, whatever your reason for murder. But that would be better than waiting till the gossips throttled her, so to speak. She had done

a clean hot act, let her have a clean hot punishment.

Her panic lessened. She asked herself where her wits had gone. She had refused to travel four miles for Cissie Rouse on Sunday night, and she was not going to be overwhelmed by the shadow of that young woman on the Tuesday morning. Not if she knew it. Even the law could not kill you on tittle-tattle, and there was nothing else but tittle-tattle to go on. Not a single actual thing pointed to George, and there would not be,—let that vermin Edie Board be never so busy.

She would go across and tell George of the discovery of Cissie's body and warn him if anybody questioned him he was to tell his own straight tale. He need not be ashamed to confess that he was late for Chapel because he was striving for light on his problem. Even a policeman would see that George was as honest and open as the new-born day. And it was only a question of time before all this cackle round George fell to the ground.

CHAPTER XVIII

She left George alone in the shed after she had told him of the death. He did not want her near. He was not sorrowing out of love for the young woman, but out of a big interest in her, perhaps a bigger interest than he had in his wife.

He came out of the tool-shed after half an hour and took to his digging again. Arabella watched him out of the corner of her eye and she was not surprised at what happened; digging could be strong medicine for human woe. George gulped off and on and then he went across the field and through the orchard and into the home shed, with his back up like an animal that has had a bellyful of shot.

Maria Porby came round in the evening and George sat fairly steady in his chair while she reported that Edie Board was mad because she had not been asked to the inquest. The Lord knew what evidence the woman thought she could give the coroner; but she was mad, none the less.

"Has everybody been warned?" Arabella asked painfully.

"Oh, yes," Maria spoke light-heartedly. "The police have been,—the one from Tokenhall and the one from Hardiston. He's a sergeant, I fancy. And they're gone again, so they say. And it's reckoned

Mr. Greenball of the shop and Post Office will be in lead of the jury. Mr. Tanpodder can't, as he'll have to give evidence."

Maria did not stop long; she could see that George's face was twitching while she talked. On the doorstep she nodded her head towards George and whispered to Arabella: "They have not called on him to appear?"

"No." Arabella was glad. For once in his life George was in no state to stand up in front of people.

Maria looked very doubtful, and then she said: "Make him eat a good supper; coax him if need be, like a child." And then Maria went off.

Arabella understood that George was all the more likely to be called upon because he had not been asked to the inquest. And she was afraid that Edie Board had done her work, though she had not been asked, either. But it was no use thinking like that; no use thinking at all. The only thing to do was, as Maria said, to eat and keep the body going. But George had a poor appetite.

He got up next morning at half-past five with her and drew the day's stuff from the loft and loaded the cart. But when he came in to breakfast at a quarter to seven he was chalk-white in the face. He could not have looked more soul-stricken if he had murdered Cissie Rouse himself. Arabella bade him liven up, but he gazed at her as if he was dazed. She did not need to ask what was in his mind; she knew its curious delayed action. He

would have more time to brood on the cart on the way to Bournebridge, and what he would be like when he stood in front of the first customer she trembled to think. He would damn himself straight off. So she said she would change her dress and do the day's delivery.

"Thank you, Bella." He was as grateful as if she had given him a hundred pounds. "I don't feel I can face anybody, and that's the truth."

"Eh?" She gaped at him. Had he conjured himself into the belief that he was responsible for Cissie Rouse's death? She would not put him past such queer reasoning. "You must face everybody. You've done nothing." She tried to hammer the words into his head.

"I've done all," he answered. "She would not have wandered out and met her death but for me."

"Rubbish! Rubbish and foolery! You may have distracted her, but your heart would flinch to kill a flea." His exaggeration made her wild, but that was no good with him. She entreated: "For God's sake, George, my dear, reckon you are in a world of clack tongues and hangmen. You aren't before God's throne, abasing your soul to a just and merciful Father."

He did not take courage, and for one minute she thought once more and more despairingly that she would give herself up and end the struggle that was taking on a crueller nature than she had pictured. But then she would be yielding to the unreasonableness she had fought in George for sixteen years

as well as yielding to the triumphant memory of Cissie Rouse. No, never. She looked at George: "I don't know that I can leave you at home. It would be better for you to go to Bournebridge to-day and learn yourself pluck and health."

"No, Bella." He smiled as if she were a child. "If I can have a day at home I shall be all right." Then he explained: "I must try to come near to Him."

"Oh, all right." She gave way. Perhaps he knew best for himself. But before she drove the cart out of the yard she warned him he might be cross-examined by the Hardiston sergeant after the inquest was over. All he had to do was to stick to his plain tale. And in any case the inquest would last a long time,—if Mrs. Beales got started she was good for an hour, and Tanpodder would hurry for no coroner. So she would be home in time to support George against any browbeating or trickery.

George asked if the police went in for that sort of thing, and she answered that she did not know from experience. But the police were like everybody else: they had a job to do and no doubt did it according to their natures.

She tried to hurry over the delivery, but the customers had a lot to ask about the affair in Arabella's parish and, willy-nilly, she had to expand the *Free Press* report. She had just passed the Church on her way home and it was a quarter-past twelve o'clock when Maria Porby plumped over the stile on the path from Potash Lane to the

Church and called for a lift. Arabella pulled up, and as soon as Maria had her breath she said she was glad she was in time.

"Whatever for?" Arabella had never seen her neighbour in such a state.

"I could not let you go home to an empty house," Maria said, "not to that and Edie Board's tongue, without warning."

"Empty house?" Arabella turned the words in her mind. "You mean to say,—they've taken my George?"

Maria nodded. "Two of them. The chap from Hardiston and another in a bowler hat from Bournebridge."

"God Almighty!" Arabella hid her face from Maria in shame. Her George was in the hands of the police; mauled about by folks who handled rogues and rascals. "What's he done?" she clamoured at Maria. "He didn't kill the young woman. Only this morning I said his heart would know torture to kill a flea. Didn't they come to any better sense at the inquest than Edie Board's sense?"

"If you ask me,"—Maria was still standing in the road with one hand on the shaft of the cart. There was nobody about,—"the inquest was little more than a blind. The police were up at our lane before nine. They came to me and they asked Edie about three questions and then told her to shut up. All the parish will soon know what Edie said to the police and what the police said to Edie. But that don't matter. The police went through your

house and sheds. George was in the field, of course, and knew nothing. Then the police went off to the inquest, or at least Edie Board thought they did till she went to give George the news he was being chased. But the Hardiston chap showed up from nowhere and told her to go outside your gate and stop outside."

"They did not arrest George that minute then?" Arabella's mind was struggling to overcome the fact of the arrest, to understand it.

"He was as good as arrested,"—Maria spoke dryly,—"with him working like a clock and one of them with an eye on him."

"Well, you'd better get up alongside me, my dear." Arabella made the seat ready. "I can't say more than thank you. But I shall remember you chased nearly a mile at your age, to save Edie's tongue from driving me frantic."

"Do you think you should go home?" Maria asked as she hauled herself up into the cart. "You're near the parson: you might take advice with him. Or there's Tanpodder farther down. Sulyer is George's best friend, but you don't like him."

"I'm going to do nothing in a hurry." Arabella put the whip to the pony. "I must have my house straight after such lumbering cows as police have been messing about in it; I shan't think straight till that's done." Then Arabella went back to the tale. "You say the police took no notice of the inquest?"

"I would not go so far as that." Maria was mystified by the police.

"Didn't the Coroner say it might have been somebody else but George?" Arabella demanded in an exasperated way.

Maria shook her old head. "Edie Board went down to the school, after she had been checked at home. And just before I left she trotted back to say the verdict was postponed."

"Oh!" There did not seem much need for postponement to Arabella; that was not the way she did things herself. She asked bitterly: "Did Edie see George marched off?"

"She didn't." Maria sighed in glorious satisfaction. "And I did."

"You're one up on Edie for ever," Arabella commented sarcastically.

Maria was not disturbed by the sarcasm. "Edie reckoned the spice would be at the inquest; and missed it. I didn't. I don't mind admitting I've fed my chickens at the top of my garden more often this morning than ever in my life. I could see George through the fence. He went to the tool-shed once or twice. But I was only wasting my time, till that Bournebridge fellow in the bowler hat came from nowhere. Out of Swale Field really. Well, he went up to George and started a chat with him. I could not hear what was said, but by the look of things George was flustered."

"Ooh!" Arabella groaned. "I warned him. But there's a sort of terror of the actual world in

George. He can't be rational when there's most need."

"I dunno." Maria was not concerned with inside things. "Your George surprised me,—and the bobby. I don't know what question took him the wrong way,—some bit of knowing filth on the bobby's part very likely. But all of a sudden George whipped up his spade and if he wasn't such a tall man and accustomed to take a long swing back, that bobby would have looked funny for a day or two; mayhap been another job for the Coroner. I tell you, I didn't believe your George had it in him, and it's made me think he has had a lot of personal need for Chapel, apart from preaching." Maria was meditative, but not for long. "But that bobby had punched George and grappled with him and blown his whistle, all before you got your breath again from the up-swing of the spade. The Hardiston chap ran over and the two of them marched George through the fence into Corner Field and along to Tanpodder's Corner. And in about ten minutes I heard the sound of a trap going off."

"He couldn't have forced their hands better. He couldn't have shown more signs of guilt if he had tried." Arabella was sick at heart.

Maria did not contradict. "Mr. Tanpodder came down to ours almost directly to see if you were home. He said George would be in the Hardiston lock-up till the magistrates met. And if Mr. Tan-

podder can be of any help, I'm to tell you he'll only be too glad."

"He's a Christian." Arabella had tears in her eyes because Tanpodder had reached his hand to the wife of a man accused of murder.

She gave the pony a good bait, and Maria stopped to get dinner ready while she tidied up the house. It needed it. The bureau was pulled about as if the police thought George and Cissie had written letters to each other and he had been fool enough to keep them in his wife's room. And the police had thrown her clothes about the bedroom as well as George's. But her Sunday skirt was spotless and her Sunday boots were on her feet. She liked to be smart for Bournebridge, whether on business or pleasure.

But successful concealment was less than her pride in herself. She did not want George Cole to swing for her; no man or woman in the world. But she had another pride,—the conviction that she had restored her life and George's to decency when she had killed Cissie Rouse. And she was not going to be treated as a criminal and buried in quicklime because she had obeyed her cleanest instincts.

The dispute between her two prides made her say to Maria Porby when they sat down to eat together: "This is going to be a big thing for me, my dear."

Maria thought she was driving at something else and nodded an emphatic agreement, and asked if Arabella had seen the morning paper.

"I didn't need to. My customers had all the print in their tongues." Arabella was contemptuous.

"If you'd looked inside the *Free Press,*" Maria stated, "you'd have seen how big this is going to be. Cissie was a Bournebridge woman. And Bournebridge wants somebody to swing for the death of one of theirs. And the *Free Press* knows it."

"That's why Mr. Bowler Hat was on the job so quick?" Arabella asked.

"One reason, you may be sure," Maria declared. "Now, against that, you've to bear in mind George was a big man in his small way. What I mean, his friends are in touch with big things. Very likely the police will tell George what he should do for his defence. But you can do better than the police. Mr. Tanpodder was a sign of the help waiting for you; good men don't like another good man proved ugly."

"You're talking sense." Arabella meant that Maria was pouring fighting strength into her and she was ready to fight, now that the arrest had come as a definite challenge. "But Tanpodder is too heavy in his wits. The parson,—the old one might have been some good, but this new man has got the mind of a boy. Greenball is too small. There's only Sulyer."

"You've to forget your dislike of him." Maria rapped her knife on the table and repeated her old song: "He's George's best friend. And in touch with big things."

"He dressed George down on Monday. He was all in favour of the young woman." Arabella reviewed that bitter memory and then put it away from her. "But that was when she was only lost. And while he could believe George was a fool and treat him accordingly, he'll be slow to believe George has been right down horrible."

"You've hit it," said Maria. "And if Sulyer is fed the right way, he'll tear himself to pieces for your George. Anyhow, you can but see."

"And when you get to the bottom of Sulyer, there's iron in him." Arabella began to admire the old gentleman in her need of him.

As soon as the two women had finished eating they put in the pony again and Arabella set off for Dodnash Hall.

Edie Board was behind her front room curtains as soon as the squeak of the yard gate told her that something was happening in connection with the arrest of George Cole. But instinct told her it was wiser not to go out and expose herself to Maria Porby's rollicking tongue,—not just at that moment.

CHAPTER XIX

Dodnash Hall did not live up to its sounding name. It stood comfortably amongst the noble trees on the hill, but although a family with a pedigree from the time of the Angevin kings of England had lived there until banking and brewing and insurance had interested it at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the dwelling-place of William Sulyer had the look of a double cottage. It rambled all over the place behind its cottage front, and possibly it may have had a more impressive garden approach under its pedigree owners. As it was, William Sulyer had ten yards of grass strip under his windows, and the simplicity pleased him and suited him.

The cook brought Arabella into the kitchen, and the housemaid took word of her arrival to the dining-room. Miss Sulyer herself came through and led Arabella to her father.

Arabella could not help herself growing defensive as she stepped along; she was ready for a dressing-down and ready to wash her hands of Sulyer at the first word of it. But Sulyer had heard of the arrest and he was almost dumb. The *Free Press* was open on the table, and he told Arabella he had read the history of Miss Rouse and the

account of the finding of the body more times than he could say.

Arabella tightened her lips and then she asked: "You think the newspaper is important?" What she meant to ask was whether the old man would stand up to the newspaper; he wasn't going to be much use to her if he was scared.

But Sulyer did not look scared; he eyed her from under his white eyebrows: "I expect the police have good reason for what they have done this morning," he said in a harsh voice, as if George's arrest had gone to his soul. "There's not much hope of the magistrates disagreeing with the police. And the Assize jury will have read the *Free Press* to-day and it will read the *Free Press* to-morrow with a description of George Cole in it." That thought quickened the old man. "Lucy!" he barked at his daughter. "Be so good as to tell 'em I want the gig at once."

Lucy went off. Arabella asked: "You don't want to hear my tale?"

"We're going to Bournebridge together. You can talk while we're going, can't ye?" The old man almost smiled, but he was too serious. "We've no time to lose, if people are to get this in the right way. And I must have been waiting for you to come and grant me leave to interfere."

"You believe he is innocent?" Sulyer seemed to have forgotten about the young woman, but Arabella wanted to know where she stood.

Sulyer's eye lit up. "We're none of us innocent;

none of us, in respect of our neighbours," he said like the clang of a gate. "What your husband has done is not for me to guess at. I know your husband, in a way even you don't know him. And there's either been some terrible mistake or his soul has undergone a bigger catastrophe than I can imagine. And in either case he needs my help."

"Thank you." The ring of Sulyer's voice told Arabella she had come to the right man.

"If you'll excuse me,"—Sulyer bowed to her,—"I'll get my hat and coat." He trotted out and Arabella stood and reflected that, if she needed Sulyer, Sulyer needed her. He was not fighting for George alone. He was fighting for his own faith; for some old-established confidence in George's character that was part of his own life and necessary to his own life.

There was no drawing-up at the front entrance at Dodnash Hall; you went along a passage to a side door and stepped in the gig. Sulyer said a few words about the weather and how the ploughing was going and then he went quiet over his thoughts on the business ahead of him. By and by his mind was free enough to give a few words to his companion: "I've had most of the gossip, Mrs. Cole. And I dare say you have had it forty times over."

"I have," said Arabella.

"Then we'll save your talking till we're at the lawyer's," Sulyer decided.

"What lawyer are we going to?" Arabella began

to quicken; she knew the back-door reputation of every law-man in Bournebridge.

"That's what I'm considering," said Sulyer. "And that's what I must find out." He noticed how Arabella drooped at his vagueness, but went on in an easy voice: "There's lawyers and lawyers, Mrs. Cole. My own man don't touch police-court work. He would put me on to his partner, but we may want a better man than his partner before we're through with this."

"I see." But Arabella saw more clearly when Sulyer had driven through the town and the streets of the lawyers out to a region of factories and small houses of yellowy white brick. He drew up at one of the factories and asked if she would hold the reins.

Arabella laughed as she sat alone in the high gig, while drays went past and the clatter of machinery beat on her ears. She had started from home with the idea that her need was important and that her information was valuable. But Sulyer had only been glad of her presence because it helped him to attend to his own need. And apparently the owner of this factory, who was also the wealthiest Chapelite in Bournebridge, had no wish to see her or hear her. She was indignant for a few minutes and raged hotly to herself against these Chapel people taking her affairs into their own hands as if she did not exist.

Then suddenly she felt she was being childish. It did not matter if her nerves had not been steady

for months through George's behaviour. They must be steady now or she would never see sense though it was in front of her eyes,—as now. Sulyer was inside that factory talking to the best business man of the town and drawing on his experience. If she had been charged with murder and laid in prison, Sulyer might have started out at George's prayer for help, but Sulyer would not have come to this manufacturer on her behalf. Sulyer was fighting for more than his faith in George, for more than the good name of Dodnash Chapel. Sulyer was fighting for all the Chapels in the county and persuading this manufacturer to do the same. Big powers of mind and of money were coming to George's aid, to her own aid.

Sulyer looked prospering when he came out, and he got up to his seat in the gig as sharply as a youngster. "They've telephoned," he jerked out. "Mr. Holank is waiting for us at his office."

It looked as if Arabella were going to figure in her own affairs when Sulyer put the gig up at the 'Standard' and walked her into the lawyer's. But she had to sit on a chair in the alley between the wall and the screen in front of the clerks' desks. She told herself that Sulyer was right to be cautious. He had not her measure and she might make vulgar boasting about Chapel methods when she got home to Dodnash.

Then she was called in to see Mr. Holank. She liked him, but she would not care to be his wife. He could be up to any cunning, though his manners

were more the gentleman's than the lawyer's. He asked her plenty of questions, but mainly to find out whether she confirmed Sulyer's tale. He promised to visit George in the lock-up on the morrow and drive on to Dodnash for a chat with her and to see the village.

"You're thorough." Arabella could see he wanted everything in his head.

When they were outside, Sulyer said that her compliment had pleased Mr. Holank and that was very important. Mr. Holank was one of the touchiest men in the world. Arabella said she would remember that fact. But she was not allowed to go home. "More sitting about," she said to herself as Sulyer led her along to the *Free Press* building. And she was right. Sulyer had a few words at the counter about a telephone message from the manufacturer, and then Arabella went upstairs to spend another hour in a waiting-room. A boy brought her some tea and she was glad of it, though she did not think much of the brewing. But her time came. The editor had her in and had a real chat with her. He was most interested in George's work in politics and religion and he understood exactly how George had been in his tired hours. He was inclined to think she was exaggerating, but she made him see George stumbling about like a blind man after he had been missioning. That editor had a better touch than Sulyer and she let her heart flow.

Sulyer looked her up and down when they were outside in the lamp-lit street. "You've done well,

Mrs. Cole," he said to her. "I've a new idea of you myself. And as for the gentleman we have just left, —there'll be no more careless news come out in the Bournebridge *Free Press*." Sulyer was not the little country farmer now; he had linked himself on to the big things Maria Porby talked about. He nodded to where the evening-paper boy showed a bill: 'Arrest in the Dodnash Case.' The boy was busy. Said Sulyer like a man on a level with all the powers of earth: "I read it while I was with the editor. It'll be different to-morrow. But not many will notice the difference; only feel it."

While Arabella was trying for thanks, Sulyer said he must get some groceries as he was in town. If she would walk along to the 'Standard' and order the gig he would be with her in a few minutes.

She stood under the corner lamp and looked after the old man. He had not guessed it would have been a real kindness to have listened to her babble of gratitude. But how was he to guess? He was an old man and the sap had dried in his brain as it had dried in his bones. And when your sap dried up you did not understand things any more.

People were pouring out of the better-class shops and offices and racing past her corner to their homes and to their teas. Their movement reminded her of her promise to order the gig. But she was reluctant to stir. She was not tired. Her mind was close to the things of life and death and in a great peacefulness. George was in prison. But he was ten thousand times more powerful there than if he

were free, than if she were there. And George must remain in prison and fight as she was fighting. When the last after-strength of the dead woman was defeated and exhausted, George could come out of prison and make his complaint then.

CHAPTER XX

ARABELLA refused Sulyer's offer to drive her over to Hardiston when the magistrates met on the Tuesday. She wanted to keep herself separate from all the world, even from Maria Porby. She knew more than anyone else and that made her think in a special way. And the less she heard of other people's ideas, the stronger she could hold to her own.

So she rode to Hardiston in the two-wheeled cart and put up at the Ferryman Inn,—ferrymen did frequent the public bar, though the inn was two miles from the river,—like a person of standing. But of course she sat beside Sulyer in Court; she was thankful for his help and wanted the world to see he was on her side.

The hearing was a long-drawn-out affair. She could not deny that every witness helped on the case, but, oh, such a lot was said to establish very little, or so it seemed until the end. Arabella was at shrieking point many a time, and at other times she was as patient as a snail. Sulyer was worse, much worse. The sight of George upset him at the beginning, as it did Arabella. George had to be helped into Court by two policemen and a chair had to be placed in the dock for him to sit upon. He did not get any better, and the publication of his foolishness was enough to take the last rem-

nants of confidence out of his supporters. Small wonder that Sulyer sweated and muttered and groaned. Arabella had to pity the old man, though his conduct did not help her.

Arabella knew all the magistrates by sight and was satisfied that most of them were inclined to favour George if anything, on account of the clamour that Bournebridge had set up in the first few days. They were certainly a cut above Edie Board; one or two of them looked over-solemn, but in the main they had a big distaste of trying a man of George's reputation for murder. But she saw their faces grow contemptuous of George as the lawyer for the police made Mr. Bowler Hat tell his tale. Contempt came into her own face at such chicken-hearted lying on the part of her husband. When George had been asked to account for his movements on the Sunday night he had answered that he left for Chapel as usual at about six o'clock. And when he was asked later on how it happened he was seen a mile from home at half-past five, George had allowed in the softest fashion that it might have been a shade earlier than six when he went out. It was hard to credit such loutish answers in the mouth of a man who had been a public speaker for years; it was like a lapse into his old father's intellect.

But worse was to come. As George maintained he had left home at six o'clock he had to deny he was loitering in School Road on the Sunday evening; but Gerald Howes, the son of Ted Howes of

the 'White Horse,' was put into the box to say he cycled past George near the gate into Swale Field at twenty-five to six. When Gerald was asked if he might not have been mistaken in the dark, he said he had known enough to sing out 'Good even, Mr. Cole.' There weren't so many six-footers about Dodnash. He was positive about the time because he had been courting his young lady at Park Farm for three years and had done the same ride every Sunday evening, summer and winter, wet or fine, and he reckoned he knew his pace to a tick.

On top of this proof of George's lies and cowardice, Mr. Bowler Hat said he had asked George if it was his footprint on the ploughland in the corner of Swale Field, the field in which the corpse had been laid. Of course Bowler Hat meant to argue that, however crafty George had been, he had put his foot down in the wrong place once. But Bowler Hat must have been bluffing, because Monday's drizzle would have taken the likeness out of any earthmarks. Still, George had not had sense enough to tell the man not to be a fool; he had said it might be his footprint—he had gone into the corner to pray.

That was the first time George had spoken the truth. But everybody was scandalized. Such a statement was dirty and irreverent in the mouth of a miserable-looking liar. Some of the magistrates stared at George as if they thought he had lost his mental balance. Anyway, the whole bench jabbered together after Mr. Bowler Hat had finished

off by saying that when he asked George what he was praying about in the corner, George had whipped up his spade and tried to kill him.

Then Mrs. Harris gave evidence that Cissie Rouse had been in a very determined mood when she went out at five o'clock that evening, and the magistrates said they must commit George for trial at the Assizes. On the evidence,—because Mr. Holank did not bring forward any contradiction,—every one believed George had got rid of Cissie in the same sort of temper in which he had used his spade against the troublesome policeman.

The hearing was over, and Arabella had a struggle to make her body go out of the Court. All the triumphant prospect had vanished. Such a poor thing as George Cole was beyond the help of all the Chapels, *Free Presses,* and rich factory-owners in the world.

Sulyer had not plumbed George's catastrophe of soul for all his fine words of a week ago, because he was in a tearing rage with everybody. He could not trust himself to speak to Arabella beyond bidding her wait for Mr. Holank. He jerked up and down and eyed the people gossiping near the building as if they were ignoramuses and unfit to have tongues. As soon as Mr. Holank appeared,—no doubt he had stopped to have a pleasant word with everybody, the police lawyer included,—Mr. Sulyer went for him as if Mr. Holank had been one of his day labourers, except that he used stiffer language. Why had Holank reserved the defence?

Hadn't they agreed yesterday that this case must be fought from the beginning? The police had no direct evidence. They were relying on the belittlement of Cole's character, which Cole himself had helped to belittle. But Mr. Holank had reserved his defence!

Mr. Holank began to say that whatever they had agreed yesterday was not binding to-day. This hearing before the magistrates was not important, except to reveal the strength of the prosecution. But Sulyer would not put up with such airy talk; it was plain he regretted that Mr. Holank had been selected to defend George. He rapped out that Mr. Holank had allowed a pitiful attitude of guilt to go unaltered, to be blazoned through the world. How many people would or could believe George Cole was innocent by nine o'clock to-morrow? And yet he was innocent; there was not the slightest doubt in the mind of William Sulyer that George Cole was speaking the truth when he said he went into Swale Field to pray and nothing else.

Mr. Holank grew redder and redder. "My dear sir,"—he flung out his white hand like a desperate actor and showed he was almost sorry he had taken up the defence,—"was Cole in any condition to improve his own case?"

"You could have helped him, nursed him," Sulyer stormed back. "I grant ye he had all the guilt of all the crimes in the world in his face. But, if he was in School Road when Cissie Rouse went out of the school-house to meet her death, isn't it natu-

ral for a man's feet to turn in the direction of his thoughts? And if he had never stopped thinking about her, as he told me on the Monday, his thoughts were how to help her, not to murder her. He went into the field where the corpse was deposited that evening. It should have been made plain that that was pure coincidence. And how could the man tell a straight tale to the police? It was known, and he knew it was known, that he had misbehaved with the young woman. And no countryman expects to be believed when appearances are against him; his lot has been too bitter in the past. These were points that could have been brought out to-day, that should have been brought out to-day." Holank knew the reporters would have taken down his words, and Holank should have known that thousands and thousands of faithful souls would have rejoiced to have read such blessed relieving words.

Holank said the faithful souls would have to wait until Cole found faith in himself.

Arabella stated that Cole never would find faith in himself. She spoke with such ancient conviction that Holank gaped at her and Sulyer sighed as though the strength had gone out of his soul.

Then Sulyer scorned her: "What d'ye mean by such nonsense?"

"Nonsense?" Arabella jeered in her misery. "You're right. I don't know what else it is. I never met such a man to bow under a conviction of sin. He has gone down and down since he was arrested.

I can see it. And if he had been pestered to-day like you wanted, he would have stood up and told the Court and the whole world what he told me on Wednesday morning last: that he was guilty and the only guilty one. And why? Because Cissie Rouse had made him believe he had led her astray and distracted her. And because she would never have been outdoors alone in the Sunday dark but for his conduct, therefore he killed her. And yet," Arabella defended her man wildly, "he is not mad."

The two gentlemen were not so cast down by her dismal revelation as she expected. They brightened, but Holank more than Sulyer. Holank's brain seemed to light up for the first time: "Go on, Mrs. Cole, go on," he entreated.

"Oh God!" Arabella was taken with a fit of shuddering because Holank treated George as a curiosity. "If only something or somebody would give him confidence!"

"Someone will." Sulyer took off his hat as if he prayed to God. "We have taught your husband hope and salvation. He knows the way; he has taught it to many."

His profound and impressive manner did not persuade Arabella out of her experience of George. Her voice was level and full as she corrected Sulyer: "You've taught him to look in his own soul for a conviction of sin till his eyes are bat-blind to daylight sense about himself. You have taught him what you said to me at your own house last

Wednesday: 'We're none of us innocent with respect to our neighbours; none of us.' You said it to me with the voice of the archangel and you have said it to him till it has shackled his mind. And nothing can break his shackles when he is in his biggest need; God won't, because his idea of God has set the shackles on him. It's no good telling him Cissie Rouse was more bigoted than worried. His soul dare not take in a new truth. That's the state he is in to-day. He's overpowered by his love of guilt. That's what he's sucked out of your doctrines, William Sulyer. And that's the cause of his exhibition to-day. I have spent my life teaching him to stand up, to shut off the noises you have taught him. But I've laboured in vain."

The tears streamed from Arabella's eyes as she recalled her husband's pitiful figure, and then she flung out her life-long protest: "What right had you to take charge of his soul, as against me? Didn't I know him? Didn't I know his father and mother, and didn't I come in for a share of the spirit-legacy they left him? Wasn't his mother terrified of death and judgment, could she keep away from Church, wet or fine, in her eagerness to be on the right side with God? Didn't any sign of difference in her son's spirit terrify her and make her nag and worry from dawn to dark, and from dark to dawn? And the old man? So scared of starvation that he durst not trust his own wits, or anybody else's. Scared into being a machine, and a broken-down one at that. That's the load my George

started with. And you hadn't any more sense than add to it. No wonder I laboured in vain. No wonder my husband has handed himself over to the hangman to-day. No wonder with fear on the one side and glory on the other, he has muddled his whole life away. In the whole earth there was nothing sane for his mind to take hold of."

Sulyer had plenty of answers to Arabella's outbreak, but he could see she was not in a state to be answered. She was resolved to condemn everybody and everything.

Holank tried the soft word and said he thought George was a sympathetic figure; he did not like a man in George's position to have a shred of popular favour. The public would be all the more eager to add something good.

"The public can add some good evidence?" Arabella looked at Holank with scourging eyes. "It can't. You don't believe in my man. And you're prattling, prattling in a kindly way. I'm obliged to you." Her sob-distorted voice rose in intensity. "I know he's innocent. But I can't look for a miracle to make him bear himself innocently. And if he's convicted, I shall die. I shall make an end of myself."

The two gentlemen told her not to say such things.

When she had steadied she looked at them and saw they were like a couple of dolls on wires, pulled about by this idea and that idea. They were not the sort to tell she and George were really fighting a

life-and-death struggle against a dead young woman who had been as terrible and ignorant in her noise as they were in theirs. She could not reveal to them that George's weakness had ruined the fight and there was no sense in keeping him in prison.

She asked abruptly when she would be allowed to see George. Mr. Holank thought she might speak to him now, before he was transferred to Bournebridge. But she said she had waved when he was led out of the Court and she could not say much more of understanding in the presence of a policeman; in fact, she was not fit to say anything to anybody at the moment. If Mr. Holank could arrange for an interview next week, she would have some sense in her head.

Mr. Holank promised to let her know as soon as he obtained permission, and Arabella went off to the Ferryman Inn for her cart.

CHAPTER XXI

Driving home, she once more recognized that something monstrous and exaggerated had entered her life at the moment when she killed Cissie. She wanted her old ordinary decent self back again. She had been going on at two gentlemen as she had never gone on at anybody in her life before,—weeping and shouting in the public road. If Sulyer and Holank and the bystanders thought her queer, she thought so twice as much as they did. But she had not been able to help herself. She did not mind being responsible for George's imprisonment and for the terrors he would suffer between this and the Assizes if only she were allowed to fight for him and for herself as she wanted to fight. But she was bound hand and foot. She had begun to explain the truth and Sulyer had looked on George as a subject for prayer, and Holank had looked on him as a curiosity. To whom in the whole world could she tell the truth and the whole truth; that she had done the deed while her mind was dead and her whole being was controlled by a spirit born of sixteen years with George Cole?

The days went past, but no confidence quickened in Arabella that George would pick up courage and wage a victorious fight. She grew more morose and apart and thoughts of the best method

of ending herself began to fill her brain. One thing was certain: the law that knew and cared so little about the lives it condemned should never hang her like a dog for having done a clean thing.

For the time being Bournebridge saved her, or rather her pride in delivering her garden stuff as though nothing had happened. Her customers asked her about George and her voice strengthened when she told them exactly what she had told Sulyer and Holank,—that George had not manhood enough to believe in his innocence of murder because he was not innocent of adultery. Her words interested people and she felt it did her soul good to proclaim against the weakness in her man.

The *Free Press* came out boldly; it printed some of the history of George's life and its report of the hearing before the magistrates omitted the more humiliating details. Then Arabella had a long kind letter from Mr. Holank to say that George was improving in his mental health. Mr. Holank said he had been bold enough to tell George that his wife would do herself an injury if he did not show more faith in his own innocence. That had acted like a marvellous tonic; in fact, Mr. Holank found it almost incredible that so simple a statement should have such a profound effect. But George had begged she would not come and see him for a few days yet, and Mr. Holank thought she herself might be steadier if the meeting took place next week instead of this.

Mr. Holank added that he had engaged a coun-

sel for the defence who was related to local people and knew what local people were like. And altogether Mr. Holank sounded so cheerful that for a moment Arabella thought the miracle had arrived and given George a stout soul. Then she pitied Holank for his optimism; George would soon relapse into misery.

She had kept to the field as much as possible,—though she knew her mind was elsewhere and had not the proper force for good gardening,—and her own customers were in George's favour from the beginning, or said they were. So she had no idea how the general opinion had changed till Edie Board stopped her one morning when she went out the front way to go up to the shop. Edie was gossiping with Susy Davy, but she interrupted herself to call out with a sneer: "So they're printing reports of your husband's health, Mrs. Cole? Same as if he was the King!"

"You're taking the *Free Press* every day now?" Arabella poked back coolly. "I hope the report says George is well?"

"Oh dear, yes!" Edie was not so savage about the report as the feeling it gave her that George Cole was not so certain to swing after all. "Mr. Cole has got over the shock that came on him as soon as he heard his poor young thing was dead. I don't take the *Free Press* to read rubbish like that, I can tell you."

"I dare say you don't." Arabella found Edie a spirit-strengthener. "But perhaps you've heard

some people pray in Church for all prisoners and captives? Some of the praying ones may be glad to hear George is better."

That soft answer only made Edie worse. She shouted at the top of her voice: "I don't hold with making a hero of a murderer. That I don't. And you mark my words; London'll be down on the *Free Press* before long. They won't let 'em print just anything about a case under trial. I've heard of Contempt of Court, if you and the *Free Press* haven't."

"You'd better go and warn the *Free Press* then, as you've warned me. No doubt they'll be grateful." Arabella walked on, gladdened by Edie's anxiety for justice. She could not help being convinced that Sulyer and the people with Sulyer had weighed the cost of contempt of Court.

Mrs. Greenball at the shop did not say anything about the case, but seemed to smother her natural briskness and brightness of eye so as not to jar on Arabella's quiet.

Such little signs lightened the heart of the most tragic fears, but the surprise was in George himself when she was allowed to see him in prison. She expected him to be up just as much as she expected him to be down, but there was more than up and down to be fathomed. He put his hands on her shoulders and looked at her as keen as light and asked how she did, just as if she had been the sick soul. He was grave of course, but there was a slow steady ring of health and mastery in his voice that

made her gasp. No doubt he got news from his warder, from Holank and Sulyer and other visitors. She remembered what a weathercock he was and told herself that the shift of public opinion would be enough to restore his manhood. But she was not quite satisfied and asked if he slept well. He said that he did and that he ate every scrap of food as if she had kept him on short rations for years.

Then she put a necessary question to him and asked if he would come back to Dodnash after he was proved innocent. His face grew tearful in a minute, which showed he still felt his guilt towards Cissie and his words about his obstinacy and ignorance showed the same thing. She was quick to say she would take steps to get rid of the tenancy and go where he pleased. His face brightened instantly and he began to ask about the spring work and how she was faring with the customers. He wished he had been able to finish the heavy digging for her before he was taken away, but she was to be sure to hire a man to help her. They could afford it. Mr. Sulyer had said they would not be a penny out of pocket over this trial. So Arabella need not worry,—not about anything.

George looked at her so meaningfully when he said she was not to worry about anything that she thought for a second he had guessed she had killed Cissie. And meant that he was taking the blame to shield her.

She could not go into the point with a uniform standing by and she soon decided it was beyond

him to guess a thing like that. Of course, he might have fancies, and fancies might harden into convictions in a prison. But he had not the exact sort of mind that made discoveries. So Arabella said she would certainly get the work forward and try for a good valuation of the garden and stock. They could do with a bit of money for a new start.

The words were no sooner out of her mouth than the tone of George's mind changed entirely.

"There'll be no new start: not together," he said.

It was like a knife-point sticking out at you from a bunch of flowers. She was just going to ask him what he meant by encouraging her to get on with the work and to be ready to go off with him and all the while to be holding back a notice to quit. But she did not ask him anything: all the old faded angers against him took new life and she flung out her acceptance of his words: "All right. It's a good riddance." And as soon as she had made that truthful declaration she reminded herself he wasn't in a proper frame of mind. He had been bright and kind and tearful and hard, all within five minutes. So she asked him patiently: "Let's hear why? Why there's to be no new start?"

He half-looked at the warder before he answered: "I opened the door of the oven to see if the sticks were in to dry for the morning." He meant that he had found her wet shoes and stockings on the night when Cissie was killed.

"Oh!" She sat down on his bed-place and looked

him over. She forgot for the moment that he was her partner in the fight against the dead woman and thought only how queer it was to be the guilty one visiting the innocent one in prison. She could have shrieked at the queerness.

And then she found her mind trying to follow his mind; how he had jumped from one piece of evidence to another. He had seen her face that night. No doubt that had been enough to convict her by itself.

"What are you doing in here then?" She made him see she didn't want his self-sacrifice. She would rather lose the fight against Cissie than be beholden to him, now he had cast her off.

"You're in darkness; in thick darkness." The hollows round George's eyes seemed to deepen and his cheeks grow thin as he gazed down at her.

"Oh, am I?" she asked bravely; she was not going to be moved by one of his revivaling tricks. "And you're in the light?" She noticed the prison-keeper's interest die down as soon as they began to talk in the Chapel way; he could not understand that George was accusing her of hardness of heart in concealing her crime.

"I'm finding my way back to light." George was satisfied with his self-sacrifice, satisfied to be paying for the agony he had brought to her and to Cissie. He looked at her more intensely. "I can see it's no good waiting for you."

"To come to your light?" She felt her whole life

would collapse if she confessed about Cissie and laid herself open to punishment. "It isn't."

She seemed to herself to melt out of the cell. Oh, she knew well enough that the warder was holding the door for her and that George was standing up like a post in the middle of a great field. He hadn't a hand's touch for her.

He had found the strength to stand his trial. But he had found that strength in his horror at her crime and at her attitude to the crime.

CHAPTER XXII

The dizziness of mind that came on her when leaving George soon passed. And if, while seated in her cart, her body was gripped and wrung by some mighty power till she could have screamed and wept for pain, that too passed. She told herself that she was giving way once more to the hysterical elements in herself. They had burst their bonds on the same night that she had killed Cissie and she must have them under control again or they would kill her. She was wrong to take the words of a man in prison too seriously. George had not really kicked her out of her place with him. He would alter as soon as he was set free.

And instantly she knew he would not alter. There was more to him than that. He had gone to prison because of his foolishness while his senses were overcome by his share in Cissie's fate. But he was stopping in prison to give Arabella Cole a chance of coming to his Christian way of looking at the deed. If she wanted to keep George, she must confess and be hung and be forgiven by God Almighty. That was the Christian way.

And she had told George she wouldn't. And she meant what she said. She would not be hung for an act that could not be helped. She did not want to be forgiven by God for such an act. She would take

what He sent. And He would like her all the better for standing by what she had done and for not denying the truth in herself.

She felt as if she were made of iron as she came into her home place and took the pony out and fed it and the other live stock. She was all taut and stern as she went across to the garden. She felt she could labour till the morrow's dawn. But her talk with George had taken a lot out of her, and she would have dropped to the ground if she had not taken her tools back to the shed. After tea, she went out to her lighter jobs round the buildings, and when she had finished these she found herself staring at the place where Cissie had once lain in the darkness. Awe filled her for a while; awe at the course her life had taken. And then her brain whispered to her while her eyes re-made the figure of the young woman on the ground: 'There was truth in that.'

She went indoors with a feeling that she was no longer Arabella Cole, but a strange woman filled with a strange and dreadful power. But later, in the solitude of the evening, she told herself that she was indeed Arabella Cole and that the worst had come to her, now that she had begun to suck strength out of ugliness. She sat in her chair as still as a dead thing. Her heart lamented. Her eyes shone with the lamentation in her heart.

Still unmoving, she shut both George and Cissie out of her mind. Shut herself as well.

She declared loudly to herself that she would

make herself a happy and healthy woman. She had a lot more than most women. She had a garden and glass houses that called for all the powers of her mind, and she had beasts she could talk to, beside the cat. Even the pigs returned love for love. There was not a thing about her place, live or dead, that she did not recall and re-create with passionate eyes and give thanks for.

Her self-command increased as the days passed. She found it always easier when the terrible thoughts invaded her mind to switch her fancy on to the things about her. She realized that she was safe from herself as long as she had her garden and her live stock.

And then Sulyer came like an angel of destruction. He had a strange manner at the very beginning and eyed her as he had done when she told him that Chapel was poison to George. He had stopped being in league with her. He meant to attack her and she began to hate him, even before he showed his hand.

Then she told herself that she could stand his hard looks; they did not break any bones. It must be very trying for him to have to wait for the Assizes and hear a Chapel man and Chapel thought jeered at meantime, by all and sundry. And no doubt he had begun to consider who had done the deed, if George hadn't, and been baffled in his considering.

He chatted to her about the subscriptions for George's defence and then suddenly asked her

point-blank when she was clearing out of the house and garden.

Arabella marvelled how the man had the impudence to interfere, but she made a quiet answer: "I don't see why I should be shifted out of this place because the police have accused George. Can you say why I should be ruined, lose the whole of what I've made, because of a blunder in somebody else?"

Sulyer was on to her in a second: "You promised George. In prison."

"I know I did," she admitted, and looked into the old man's eyes and welcomed him to read the cause of her change of mind, if he could. And the remembrance of all that her place meant to her now warmed her speech: "When you come to think of it, I made the garden and the trade, and not George. It's my property, by rights, more than his. And my voice should count more than his. And where's our living to come from after he's set free? Out of a few pounds of subscription money?"

"Out of your future work: in another part of the world," said Sulyer.

"Oh!" She could see through Sulyer and told him so. "You're making too good use of George Cole's fads and fancies. But I'm the earner here. And I tell you that poor people like us can't afford fads and fancies."

Sulyer gave her the law. She was to go; and be ready to go on the first day of the Assizes. George had made his own name and Dodnash into

a cause of offence throughout the length of the land. The sooner he was out of sight and out of mind, the better. And if his wife did not bow to that opinion, the money for the legal expenses would be returned to the subscribers.

There was a much bigger threat lurking somewhere behind Sulyer's words, but Arabella only answered that she had heard there were lawyers who would undertake a famous case for nothing. She did not know where she would find such a lawyer, but her talk was enough. A look of doubt came into Sulyer's face and she knew instantly that he and his like wanted to keep their hands on the defence.

Just as she thought she had him beaten and had resolved to sit in her place for ever, Sulyer stated that he had been very kind, but now he was compelled to obtain George's authority to sell the stock-in-trade and the furniture in spite of her objections.

She could not open her mouth. Everything was in George's name and Sulyer could do as he pleased with George.

Sulyer stood and looked at her as if she were so much dirt before his broom. She had made a mistake somewhere; let herself go too much on that day of the hearing before the magistrates. Or perhaps Sulyer had been questioning George about her. And George always betrayed himself when he tried to keep anything back.

The last thing Sulyer said as he got up into his

gig again was that he must have something definite in a very few days. He knew he was boss and let her know it.

The next morning after delivery she went down to Nine Elms Street which leads out of the Cattle Market and called on Mr. John Mite, who had 'Auctioneer Valuer and Estate Agent' in gilt letters on the gauze screens in his windows, but specialized in transferring little businesses. A girl in a grubby apron showed her into a front room with a desk and some chairs and some ancient auction bills in it and then went off to the public-house at the corner.

Mr. Mite had not a quick mind or he would not have lived in Nine Elms Street. He certainly saw there was some commission for himself when he heard Arabella's errand, but asked if it were not a lot of unnecessary labour to deliver to customers one by one instead of selling wholesale. Especially when you lived as far from the town as Dodnash. Mr. Mite thought himself very up-to-date for making that criticism. Arabella told him that wholesale never gave you value for your labour and less than quarter value to anyone like herself who grew exhibition stuff. The man's childishness made her want to sell her trade in spite of herself: just to prove him silly.

Mr. Mite's mind wandered for a while and then he hoped she was not connected with this Dodnash case. Arabella asked him if she would be selling a good business if she were not connected with the

case. Mr. Mite said she might not have been. But the murder was going to spoil her market; she must be prepared for that.

She could have praised Mr. Mite for the cleverest auctioneer in the kingdom. Sulyer could not expect his commands to be carried out while the market was so much against her. She would not tell him so at once. She would play with him for a week or two first. But to Mr. Mite, Arabella said boldly that the murder did not take place on the premises and there must be plenty of young couples who would be only too glad to get hold of a first-class market garden and private trade.

Mr. Mite had hold of a good point and he wasn't going to forsake it. He declared that he had never known a case excite so much feeling and noise in all his experience, and it would be very unpleasant for anyone to go into the place just now. After the Assizes it would be a different matter.

"But you can mention the property meantime?" Arabella felt bound to require so much activity.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Mite despondently. "Though talking about it now will only cheapen it. Make a feeling it's to be had for nothing."

She left the unenthusiastic salesman and in an exhilarate frame of mind. There was no compulsion to see anyone else; the next time she might fall in with one of these young fellows who believed in getting on in the world. And he might sell her out before she had time to cry whoa.

It was a picture, when she called at Dodnash

Hall, to see Sulyer's face light up with solemn pleasure in his mastery. He condescended enough to her miserable self to hope she would get a little for the goodwill of the trade she had created, and in spite of the circumstances. He purred to know that his Chapel's good name would soon be restored.

She smiled scornfully to herself as she left the Hall. Sulyer was another of the weak ones; scared out of kindness and truthfulness by the tongues of Tom, Dick and Harry. He and George had not the pluck of a frog between them.

But if they had not the pluck of a frog they had the whip-hand of her. She would have to obey the weak ones. It was no use trying to delude them or herself. It was only a question of time before George and Sulyer found her out and put an end to her shilly-shallying with Mr. Mite. They would drive her out of the garden-place she had made; out of the sole comfort of her broken and ruined life.

Yes, the trees along the road had more right to be in the world than men and women. They stood all stately along her home track, away from everybody, following the course of their lives, sprouting now into the full green of spring and big enough in soul to take an axe or a storm without more than the moment's murmur. But we cut down the trees to warm our silly hands and to cook the food for our craving stomachs.

She came into her home-yard and it seemed as

heartless as a bit of waste land. There was the pony in the shafts in front of her, and her ducks waddled into sight and put up their beaks in loud greeting just as usual. But they seemed away from her: as far away from her mind as the trees along the road. Sulyer and George were kicking her out of her last refuge, kicking her on to herself and her terrible thoughts. Leaving her to stand and stare nakedly at the ruin of her life. Sixteen years she had laboured to make something; sixteen years she had fought for the good of George Cole in body and soul. And in the end she had done a deed for George Cole that had robbed her of her self-respect for ever, that had classed her with the ugly ones and had put such ugly thoughts into her soul that her soul revolted.

She felt sick, and she was sick. She had not known hitherto that a person's power dwelt in the stomach and had never realized hitherto such awful emptiness of power. When she got down from her cart and struggled to the pony's collar to lay up the reins she felt like one of the dead allowed out of his coffin for a walk.

CHAPTER XXIII

Her mental strength left her rapidly after this physical sickness. She herself was unaware of the full extent of the weakening until she was awakened in the night by the tears that streamed from her own eyes. She could not check the tears, though they terrified her. Then she had no wish to check them, for they comforted her.

She went off on her delivery round in the morning, but her heart lagged and no amount of goading could make it quicken. Her customers were the same as ever towards her, but it hurt her brain to see any of them, let alone talk to them. She fainted on one doorstep. The strength dropped out of her before she could cry warning. Somebody was giving her brandy when she came round and telling her to go straight home. But she finished her round.

Funnily enough her last house was quite near the place where she had first set eyes on George, and she stopped her cart where Dad had stopped his so long ago for the fight that never came off. But her mind was too blurred to revive these memories with any acuteness and had no inclination to linger on Dad's old words about starvation being the beginning of life. She had no time for fancies; she must work out what to do. She was ill; her own

body told her that more clearly than the face of all the world. She was alone; nobody could take her place in the garden or on the round. And the day she took to her bed she was ruined. She knew what private customers were like after nursing them for sixteen years.

She touched her pony and drove down to Walls' yard and saw the foreman. He took her delivery book into the office and presently came out and led her in to talk to Mr. Walls himself. Mr. Walls took a hasty look at her face and then said he was most sorry for the trouble that had struck her down. More to the point, he made her quite a decent offer for her book debts and goodwill and for her garden stuff as wholesale.

She had made a certain amount of relief for herself and she grew eager for more. Her whole body hungered with desire for strength to live through her bitter fight. She bought a dozen of stout as she had often heard it was more of a food than beer. When she was home again she found more than drunkard's ease in allowing her wretchedness to take charge of her mind and soul. Yet that immeasurable spiritual debauch pointed her to saner comfort in the long outpouring to Maria Porby in the evening.

Abandonment did her more than temporary good; did more than restore her reputation with her neighbours. From her childhood up, she had had to be as firm-minded as her Dad and for sixteen years she had had to call on all the strength

and hardness in herself in order to cope with the spiritual excesses of her husband. And she had had to be remorselessly active in all things in order to build up her trade. Now that the fruits of her labour were taken away from her and the power to labour itself was diminishing, the other elements in her began to take life.

It seemed to her that you had to be struck down to the ground and trampled on by all the clowns in the world before you grew wit enough to take proper stock of things. You had to be idle; full of a burning hatred of work and of the bread and butter you got by work, before the quieter things in you got their chance. It was a crazy state to be in. But in this aimless stage it seemed to Arabella that there was a certain marvel in the unstable sympathy of Edie Board and the patient faithfulness of Maria Porby was like finding a wonderful jewel in the ashes of a bonfire of your possessions.

No, she did not want to be sulky and set apart any more; neighbours were as much a part of you as your flowers. And helped you to take courage again.

She was quite mild when Sulyer came along just before the Assizes to ask if she were ready to flit. She made out that she had sold her private trade in obedience to his commands and was only hanging on to the garden for something to do. He had no mercy on her meekness and declared she should be sold up as soon as George was a free man. But he was not so sure of the verdict as he had been.

More than Edie Board had been offended by the excessive noise of the newspapers. And a lot of people were ready to think just the opposite to Nonconformists. So though Sulyer looked at her as cold and still as a frozen pond, he said he had arranged for her seat in the Court.

He did not say that he suspected her. He had nothing definite to go on. And he could not start blackguarding the woman whose testimony had been of so much value to George in the first place.

She went down to the trial and saw George come into the dock. Her heart was in her mouth, but he just looked through her.

The trial was just about the same as it was before the magistrates, only ten times as long. People sitting round Arabella said it was a wonderfully fair and careful hearing, but her knowledge of all that had led up to the hearing gave her a different opinion. From her point of view, carefulness and fairness were the best blinkers in the world. She wanted something more than Justice plodding along like a plough-horse in a furrow to decide the right and wrong of her battle with Cissie.

But all she had to do was to sit still and keep her mouth shut and watch George. He bore himself well, but his mind was terribly strung-up. When the prosecuting lawyer probed into the love-business with Cissie, George broke down and sobbed. The lawyer was on to him like a knife. The way he tried to get a confession out of George was

like cutting a man's inside about. Of course it was right to flay a man in a matter of murder.

After he had pulled himself together, George grew self-righteous in his answers, as was natural when you knew you were standing to the gallows for somebody else. The lawyer played up to that instantly. He pretended to be George's friend, and before long George was saying he had meant well by Cissie all along. As soon as the lawyer grinned, George realized how bad that sounded in the man who had got a woman into trouble. But it was too late.

The clever men made a fool of George for three days on end. And the only consolation Arabella had was in hearing the clever ones make fools of themselves over some scratches on George's wrist. They argued and denied for hours that Cissie had made these scratches in her death struggle. And the simple truth was that George was the clumsiest man in the world at trimming a hedge and never would wear gloves on the job.

The scratches just about did for George. When the Judge summed up he allowed that George might have got the scratches in the course of his work, and he allowed he might not. The jury were to say whether they believed George's version. It was plain the Judge himself did not.

Arabella was seated in the row behind Sulyer and his daughter and she saw the old man bow his head when the jury went out to consider their verdict. He had lived long enough to know what

was coming; to picture to himself the shameful end of the man he had loved and trained in his own faith. And Arabella began to work out how she would act after George was sentenced. She had plenty of rat poison at home. She would take some after she had made her confession to Holank. No clever pig in a wig should snout into her heart.

The jury did not come back into Court that day. And the whole town of Bournebridge seemed to gasp when the news came out that the jury had been shut up in special rooms in an hotel for the week-end.

She spent her week-end in doing as much work as she could. But she was unable to humbug herself on the Monday morning and she was at Holank's office by eight o'clock. But, of course, the place had not come to life, and as she told herself after she had stared at the door for five minutes, nothing would be settled before ten o'clock at the earliest. She went down to the docks and tried to amuse herself for a couple of hours; but she was back at Holank's at a little past nine. The clerks gave her a chair and after she had sat for two hours like a mummy a telephone message came through from Mr. Holank. The jury had been discharged and George was to be re-tried at King's West in about two months' time.

Two months more of all she had lived through. She thought her mind was going from her and fought against it. And the effort to keep her senses made her scream and cry. The clerks carried her

into Mr. Holank's room and put her on a couch there. She got herself in hand and took the chance to wash and tidy herself.

Mr. Holank came back from the Court and told her it had been a very near thing indeed. Only two jurymen had stuck out against the verdict of guilty. One of the two believed George was innocent and the other one had a religion that made him disapprove of every law in the world.

Mr. Holank looked as if he had been thrashed with a whip. He had had the chance of a lifetime, and it was as good as gone. He said they could not hope for a couple of eccentrics on the jury next time. Presently, he looked straight at Arabella and said he was going to concentrate on finding the guilty person. He had more resources than the police. And it was the only way to save George Cole from the hangman.

Arabella asked him how George was bearing the postponement.

Holank did not like altering his line of thought, but he said that George had broken down and Sulyer was with him. Arabella went straight to the door and said she was going to be with George. Holank jumped out of his chair and ran after her and found a cab on the Town Place. He did not say a word while they were on the way to the prison. But when he came back to the waiting-room after he had seen the people who mattered, he said that the doctor had ruled against visits.

"Sulyer is with him." Arabella's jealousy grew as bitter as death.

"Please don't make a scene," Holank entreated as if he were at a garden party. "Mr. Sulyer was here before you. Red tape is red tape."

She could see that Holank was telling her some sort of lie, so she went out into the street. Then Holank asked her with a very serious face if she would come back to his office.

"Is George gone silly?" she asked him as soon as they were in the cab.

Mr. Holank said he did not know, and Arabella told him he must know.

But Mr. Holank was not thinking about George. William Sulyer had said to him that morning that only two people were interested in the death of Cissie Rouse, and as George Cole had spoken the truth when he denied the murder, Arabella Cole had done it. Mr. Holank could not quite accept that, as Arabella was not behaving like a wife who wanted her husband hung because he had got entangled with another woman. She loved the faithless husband. Mr. Holank was very pleased with himself when he now had the further idea that Arabella wanted nothing in the world but her husband. He took still greater pleasure in finally answering her question and in watching her face as he stated he had not seen the prison doctor at all. But that George himself had refused to see Arabella.

"Oh!" Arabella was aware of the watchful eyes,

but the man who had cast her off and stared through her as if she were a piece of glass had power on her still.

"He may not have been quite responsible." Mr. Holank read the torment in Arabella's face and seemed to speak sympathetically. "In fact, his manner was alarming enough to justify the idea. He rolled his eyes and raved about you living in darkness and never coming out of it. I don't see why you should be repulsive to him?" Mr. Holank spoke tenderly and waited hopefully.

"His mind don't work like yours and mine," answered Arabella.

Mr. Holank nodded gravely and tried again. "The postponement would have given encouragement to the average man. But not to him. He knows his own nature; knows that he may break down in his cell. He knows that he is breaking down already. But he has no self-pity. Not one word of it. His mind is wholly and solely on you."

"Ah!" That was some balm to Arabella.

"It is very strange," said Mr. Holank.

"Yes," Arabella agreed.

"I said it was very strange, Mrs. Cole," Holank persisted. "Why this terrible absorption in you? This talk of thick darkness in you and round you?" Mr. Holank challenged openly. "There is some terrible secret, Mrs. Cole."

"I can't help thinking you're about four foot high, Mr. Holank." Arabella's mind was mostly on George as she made this curious reply. She had

deserved the treatment that George had measured out to her, but that did not make it the less overwhelming.

"The terrible secret will save George Cole," Mr. Holank dinned in her ears. "And you have to confess it; you must confess it."

She rose from her seat and put her head out of the window and ordered the cabman to draw up. When she was on the pavement she put her head within the open doorway and spoke her reason for her behaviour: "You're nothing but a village lout of fifty years ago: in his worst frame of mind and in his worst ignorance. I've heard of such taking a cat to the blacksmith's shop and burning it with white-hot irons because it was nothing but a damn old stray. Well, I'm no cat. But you're the lout under your fine clothes and your fine manners. Nobody but a lout would take up your lawyering job. Nobody but a lout would have anything to do with gaols and hangmen and fining wrong-doers for being wrong in themselves. I had a Scotch father. I didn't like him for his conceit. But this day I know he was right in his favourite saying, 'The maist o' fowk are fools.' "

It was easy for Mr. Holank to talk above Arabella's voice, because she was long past the noisy stage. And he told her very firmly that it was no use her accusing anybody and everybody when she was accused herself. It was only an admission of her guilt.

"Is it?" she demanded with eyes like black glass.

"The police will have me for murder because I've called you a lout?" Then she faced up to the conviction that had taken possession of the lawyer: "I'm running away from you in body and running away from you in mind? Is that it? Then I'll tell you why: nobody and nothing are going to interfere between me and myself. The man that follows me too close, will find me dead on his doorstep one morning. And one day, when you're more than four foot high, you'll understand why I've done it."

She could tell that Mr. Holank was revolving better means for another attack on her, even while he listened to her. And she turned away from him in a steadfast decision to be dead before the next prying came along. There was a gaping crowd all round her, because the cab had stopped in the middle of the best street of the town and she had been recognized. Her face must have been less calm and ordinary-looking than she imagined, since everybody made way for her in silence when she set to go towards the public-house where she had left her pony and cart. But the most part of her mind scarcely took in what the people did.

CHAPTER XXIV

She had not boasted when she told Holank that she had had enough. Far from it. It was written right across her mind in quiet lettering. The day she went out for good and all would be a good day. It might be very soon.

She was in the same boat as Cissie Rouse had been; she was at the end of her tether through George Cole. Cissie might as well have been allowed to go off with him; she would have found herself shamed and broken in time by the sky-climbing man. What right had he, of all men, to condemn anybody? He knew well enough that his senselessness had worked his wife on from point to point till the furious hands at Cissie's throat had only obeyed his commands. But he had told all the world that his wife was so foul that he could not bear to see her in the hour of his deferred hopes and in the hour when she most needed touch with him to renew her in her own internal struggle.

Well, she had done with him. She had been crazy to cling to him as long as she had.

Maria Porby came round for news of the trial and stood and watched her while she did a few jobs about the stable. Maria had never bothered herself unduly about her old Jimmy. She was too wise; she had looked after his victuals and his shirts and

let the rest go. But she would not have done as well as she had if she had treated George like Maria treated Jimmy. George had always wanted more than his victuals and shirts; in fact, they came last in his needs.

She told Maria everything, including the way George had preferred Sulyer to her. Maria had friendly tears in her eyes when she summed up: "You've got two more months to wear your brain for him. And much good you'll have at the end of it."

"No." Arabella thought to hold her speech, but she knew that Maria had guessed most things and she might as well know the rest. "I shouldn't be surprised if I took a drop of poison before then."

"Oh!" Maria didn't make much outcry. "I don't know that I should blame you, knowing you as I do." And then Maria went dumb for a long time: adding up everything in her old head. She began again doubtfully, trying to get hold of the mind underneath her neighbour's deadness. "I dunno, Bella. I dunno if you'd bear transplanting at your time of life."

"I hadn't thought about it," answered Arabella indifferently.

"Apart from all else, you're ground-sick," Maria declared. "Ground-sick. And I have seen wonderful-grown trees do well, when they were lifted carefully. You might make new root."

"Oh!" Arabella got a little brighter. It was good gardening talk.

"Fresh soil," insisted Maria. "Right fresh soil, all round."

"Ah!" Arabella quickened still more. The idea meant no more George, no more of anybody. It meant just herself, striving to keep life in herself. Then her face darkened. "It means giving in to everybody; to Sulyer."

"You got to," stated Maria. "When it's a question of life or death."

It cost her much self-dispute before she yielded to the idea planted by Maria. She felt very like her old Dad in the way he had been so obstinately himself though thrown out of the best jobs in the kingdom. And Dad had been right; he had never been another man's man. He found himself,—after he had made his own little trade.

But, at bottom, her own health was more than her sorrow over George Cole and more than the defeat of William Sulyer, more than her garden and home.

As soon as she decided she would try a new sort of life, she found herself discontented with an agent like Mr. John Mite and drove across to her old home. She had heard from her brother Bob when the Dodnash case first got into the papers and she had called on him at his stall in the Flower Market to say she had enough help from Sulyer. Otherwise she had not seen much of Bob since Dad's funeral. The first thing Bob did, after he stepped into Dad's shoes, was to get rid of Dad's private trade. House-to-house delivery, said Bob,

was a waste of time and of money for the grower. It was the same doctrine as Mr. John Mite's and it must have made Dad turn in his grave. But Bob had done pretty well and he sold any amount of seeds and shrubs to the big people who advertised their specialties all over the world.

When Bob saw her, he raged at her. He said she looked like the picture of death, and she was to stay with him and his wife until he had got rid of her place for her. That did more credit to Bob's heart than his head, for, as she pointed out, she could not expect to sell her garden if it were allowed to go to ruin while waiting for a buyer.

Bob did not know of any young couples—or of any old ones for that matter—who were on the look-out for a little gardening business, but he promised to pass the word round the trade. He added that Mr. John Mite had talked like a fool. Arabella's carts and tools and pony and pigs and chickens would fetch their market price, whoever their owner might be. If she did not get an offer for the garden, she was not to bother about it. You never did get any reward for improvements: except the satisfaction of knowing you had paid off your debt to your forefathers by benefiting somebody in the future.

One way and another Bob put a lot of heart into her. And she had need of it during the succeeding days. Because her nature made her pay the price of admitting defeat; made her weep tears of blood,

if there are such things. She wept tears of the soul, anyhow: and they are bad enough.

Still, as luck would have it, Bob sent her a couple of people within the fortnight. The young woman could talk your head off and she had to be told fifty times before she could accept the fact that Cissie's body had not been found in the garden or in the sheds or in the house. She looked as though she might be clever with her fingers, otherwise Arabella could not see why the lanky, slow-eyed husband had married her. However, after a long argument whether the fowls should be included in the price, Arabella closed with the pair and promised to be out of the place within the week.

Edie Board came trotting round as soon as the couple had gone and Arabella gave the news of her departure. Edie stared at the decent bits of furniture and then turned her eyes sideways at Arabella and half-giggled: "You ought by rights to give me that old grandfather clock before you slip off."

"Oh!" Arabella kept herself quiet. "And why's that?"

"Oh, I don't know." Edie meant that she did know and that Arabella knew.

"No." Arabella was not going to stand blackmail. "We've been near-livers, but not neighbours. And you know it. I'm giving that bureau to Maria Porby for a keepsake. But the clock is sold to the new-comers."

"I've done more for you than Maria Porby," Edie flared out. Her eyes gleamed and her lips

worked. "I could have put the police on to you instead of George, in the first instance. Yes, Mrs. Cole you'd have been quoded and hung by this, but for me."

"You'd better go home and put yourself to bed till you're better, Edie," Arabella recommended.

Edie was handy for the door, so she had courage to go on: "You're not out of the wood yet, my dear. Everybody knows it was you killed Cissie."

"Ten jurymen and a Judge didn't think so," Arabella suggested.

"Two jurymen had their suspicions. And by the time the next trial comes along, twelve good men and true'll have something to say to you. You mark my words, Mrs. Arabella Cole. You're being watched. And your guilt hasn't left you alone since the night of the deed."

"Well, you won't get my grandfather clock if I am hung. So it isn't much good exciting yourself, is it?" Arabella inquired.

Edie's mind was mostly on the clock and she could not recover her fury after hearing the common sense about the clock. But she went away promising to tell somebody something. Arabella sat down for a time, because these sudden assaults took a lot out of her. Although she had played Edie off more quietly than she had Holank.

She felt an instant desire to settle her future work and an idea that she had entertained and scorned came back into her mind. The next morning she put her pony in the cart and drove through

Bournebridge to the Grennis Hand Laundry. She approved of the manageress, who was a young woman of thirty with a look of being fond of the boys. She was hard as nails at her job and that suited Arabella. It was going to be a big refreshment, just to yield her will into the keeping of somebody who knew their own mind.

Arabella said she would come to work under the name of Mrs. Fleming and that she was too old in the tooth to bother if the other women found out her married name and got on to her about the murder. She added that she could do cottage washing with anybody and had wit enough to pick up the town way of finishing off. The manageress sized her up again and approved of the work-thinned body. She said she thought they would get on together and then gave Arabella a couple of addresses for lodgings.

No sort of warmth or eagerness grew in Arabella, but it was sufficient to have the tired knowledge that she might begin to pick up again one day.

Sulyer came along to strike her down for ever. He did not give her any warning of his coming. Edie Board must have been along to him and have told him a queer tale. Because Sulyer had all the conceit in his bearing that comes of knowing yourself stronger and better furnished in mind than the person with whom you are dealing.

Her ears were abnormally quick these days and she recognized his walk before he turned the corner into the yard. She left her job of tidying up

the loft for the new-comers and stepped across to the lattice to watch him go up to her door, just as she had watched Edie Board one morning a few long months ago. She let him knock a couple of times. It made her sick to think of talking to a man like him: full to the brim with certainties about everything. But she knew he would come and look for her and she did not want to be caught hiding. She went below.

"Well?" she sang out across the yard when she was at the barn door.

He came over to her, touching his hat half-and-half, like a Liberal gentleman. He was set over in the shoulders by age and lumbago, but seemed to straighten to let his eyes play on her; almost smiling like a knife-blade when it catches the light. He was different metal from Edie Board and from town-trained Holank. William Sulyer riveted himself and his followers into a religion because he knew enough to be afraid. And, in God's Truth, there was enough to be afraid of, though she had not thought so a few years ago. There was weakness and strength to be afraid of—George's weakness and her own strength. No. It was her weakness to fear now, and George's strength. He would not blab about her shoes and stockings for weakness, but he might out of righteousness.

Thoughts ran through her mind. And through Sulyer's. He stopped in front of her and used Edie Board's words: "So you're slipping off?"

She did not answer a word. He was not going to be allowed to talk to her like that.

"I said you were slipping off," he repeated himself, and meant she should be talked to as he pleased.

"I heard you, Mr. Sulyer. And for the past six weeks you've been hounding me to get out and promising to sell me up, lock, stock and barrel. Now I'm doing it on my own account, I'm slipping off." She let him read her opinion of him in her face.

"I hounded you,—as you call it,—for your husband's sake. . . ."

". . . for your Chapel's sake," she corrected him.

"For both." He corrected her. Then he waited a second so as to be weighty. "But that was before Mr. Holank had charged you with committing murder."

"He said something about terrible secrets," Arabella allowed.

"And you ranted about him and all men being louts. But you'll find that louts have sound reasons for dealing with crime as they do."

"Well, let 'em do it," said Arabella, challenging his knowledge.

"I'm ready to grant that a woman of your character does not commit murder except after long and unbearable provocation," Sulyer answered in a milder but untrustable way.

"But you don't know much, do you?" Arabella

noticed the weakening and told herself that George had not blabbed about the wet stockings.

Sulyer made a mistake and read a jeer into her words. The blood showed under his white skin. "You could have met Cissie Rouse after George was at Chapel."

"Well, where did I meet her?" Arabella inquired.

"In the School Road," Sulyer stated easily.

Arabella smiled. Even now they had not thought she could carry nine stone for nearly a mile. Even now they hadn't thought of the back way across the fields. Sulyer thought her smile was guilty derision and he went on as Edie Board might have gone on, if Edie had learned how to think from point to point. "You met her in the School Road, close to the gate. But you did not walk on the plough-land as George did in his anxiety of soul. You kept on the grass bank with your burden. And when you had taxed your strength, you flung it down."

She half closed her eyes. She was truly tired of listening to him. "I've all the work I can get through. If the place is to be decent for my new people." She turned round and walked up the stairs to the loft. Ah, she had been right to ease her load and be ready to endure Sulyer's gimlet eyes. One wrong movement of her face and she would have been plagued into collapse by him.

And while she so thought, she heard Sulyer coming up the stairs to her. She quivered to her feet.

He wasn't to be shaken off like Edie Board. And he had changed his tune when he began again. She felt all his religion making him strong and clever; making him one of the never-beaten of the world. Well, she was one of the never-beaten, too.

His voice sounded coaxing: "There's one thing more I know about you, Mrs. Cole, just one thing."

"Then out with it. And be done with it," she commanded him. She felt her loft should be refuge and sanctuary, though her house and yard were not.

"I know a woman of your character can't lay hands, violent hands, on another life without disrupting her own life. That's the one thing I know."

"Then you know a lie," said Arabella.

Her answer could be taken as an admission and he persisted: "I've been told of your fainting on doorsteps. Of how you sold your private trade for the first money offered. How you bought stout,—and did not drink it. How you have been sick in your field . . . all for nothing."

"I could kill twenty Cissie Rouses. And they wouldn't disrupt me," said Arabella, as quietly as Sulyer himself.

"You may not think it is Cissie that's disrupting you. You may think it's anxiety, bad feeding, gossip, loss of trade. But it's Cissie Rouse. All the time and in everything." William Sulyer reckoned he knew.

"Can't you leave me alone?" Arabella lost hold of herself and screamed out against the lie. "Liars,

all of you. Liars, the gossiping she-cats; liars, the lawyers. Liars, the religionites. I'll give you the truth. I'll tell you who killed Cissie Rouse. You did. George's father did. Cissie herself did."

"You won't help yourself by talking madness," Sulyer assured her.

"I'm not talking madness. Nor pretending it. Though I may look it. I'm Truth. And saying it." Arabella drew herself in. She was afraid of speech, but she felt she would die if she didn't break out. Only one guiding thought remained in her mind, that she must not be too clear about herself. "Old man Cole killed Cissie Rouse when he starved George Cole and destroyed his will power. You killed Cissie Rouse when you fed George Cole with ideas too big for him; when you made him believe he was fit to go round the world preaching salvation, before he had known the truths of hell himself. Cissie Rouse helped to kill herself when she took advantage of George's weak will and his swollen ideas. And now you know the truth, get busy. Get hold of yourself and of the ghosts of the dead ones. And swing 'em all on the gallows."

"Then I must take you first," said Sulyer.

"Me?" Arabella broke into a wild joy in the dimness of the loft. "Me? I fought against the powers that were to kill Cissie Rouse. Fought against 'em night and day for sixteen years. Fought Old Cole, Mother Cole, you, William Sulyer, in the holl below your house. Fought George's vainglory and his shame. Fought Miss Rouse's cunning.

And if at the last I was done down by the multitude of enemies and the sense knocked out of me, I've fought a good fight. I'm entitled to respect. Not to punishment.

"I'm not disrupted by Cissie Rouse or her ghost. I'm disrupted by fight. No mortal woman can go on as I've been going on for sixteen years and not be drained out. Drained as dry as a pond in summer. Dry as an old stalk from two summers' crop. She's disrupted all right, when at the end of her time she's stripped and prodded and thrashed. Aye, William Sulyer, don't you come here believing your fairy tales and strong for right and wrong. You go home and call back to mind your own mother's life. And ask yourself whether just looking after the menfolk that God in His cruelty has made women feel responsible for, whether that isn't enough. And then say what point there is in your justice; what sense in all the prattle on your ancient tongue?"

Her last words were more breathed than spoken. She had come to the end of her bodily and mental strength. Hidden things had torn their way out of her brain and declared themselves. And they had slashed her mind to ribbons as they made their way.

She leaned against the whitewashed wall of the loft waiting for Sulyer to take his leave. She was not afraid of him any more, but she had had enough of him.

Sulyer did not go. He set his jaw obstinately. There might be a kind of righteousness, a kind of inviolateness about this woman, but George Cole had to be saved and murder had to be punished. Or there was an end to the ordered life of man. She had been careful in her wildness. But she might break down,—she was very near it now,—if he persisted.

He threatened her: "I shall take all you have told me to the police. You have admitted the crime in defending it."

Her fearlessness remained with her; her contempt for all the arbitrary arrangements of men: "I've admitted nothing. I've talked. After months of it, I don't care two straws what I say about it."

"Oh, don't you?" Sulyer jeered. "You were mighty careful, for a careless one."

"Oh, go home!" she bade him. "I'm tired. Tired. You can come to Grennis, if you want to yap at me again."

"Indeed!" William Sulyer was not accustomed to orders from labourers' wives. But she was not a labourer's wife. She was the daughter of that drunken, bitter-tongued Scotsman, Andrew Fleming, and had inherited a great deal too much intellect and cunning. There was nothing more to be got out of her, now she had recovered her self-possession. He accepted her terms:

"I shall come to you at Grennis; when George Cole is sentenced."

Arabella bowed her head as she stood against the wall. She felt blind and sick and deathly. But presently she heard Sulyer stepping carefully down the stairs in the uncertain light. And in a minute more the yard gate clattered behind him.

CHAPTER XXV

In a little while she was glad of Sulyer's attack on her because it had made her surer of her own honesty, and she was grateful to Grennis because it, also, enabled her to take a fresh hold on herself.

The work was indoors and of a kind,—washing and ironing endless clothes—that she had never had any real zest for. She was told what to do and how to do it; the minute to start work and the minute to leave off. It was queer, after a lifetime of thinking for yourself and of never leaving off. She felt exactly like a penny-in-the-slot machine; she was fed with so much money and she delivered the article. Still, it was a wonderful rest, and she came to the conclusion that she had sought the job in obedience to the same instinct that makes a dog eat grass.

She had a tussle with the other laundry women on the very first day. Some of them must have known her from seeing her about the town on her delivery cart. Anyhow, they had her added up by dinner-time, before they started work again. One of the twenty-year-old girls began it: one full of the sap of life and without a thought or a care of what was ahead of her.

"And where do you spring from, old dear?" the wench squeaked out.

"Nowton All Saints," said Arabella truthfully. She had lived at Nowton. But there was a burst of laughter, and the young woman had another poke.

"What's your name, then?"

"Mrs. Arabella Fleming."

"Not Cole?"

"That was before my old man gave me the sack. Now I'm where I was before I'd learned anything." Arabella did not smile, but she was quite easy.

"Didn't do in the teacher between you, by any chance? And then push your old man into quod?" The young woman was saucy and nothing else. But the older women were listening carefully.

"You'd better ask the police, my dear," Arabella answered in her quietest manner. "And when you have had a bit of bad luck yourself, you'll be a friend to the fleas in your bed."

It was easy to get the laugh on a rattle-headed bit of goods, but Arabella knew she had done better than that when she saw the older ones approve her bearing and overheard them say to one another that there was always more in such cases than met the eye. It was Edie Board and Maria Porby over again. But, thank God, at Grennis, the Edies had a bit more to do than chin-wagging. Compared with town women, three-quarters of the country women were dog-idle.

The lengthening evenings of early summer drew Arabella out of her lodgings to wander round the

unpaved roads of the neighbourhood. For Grennis was a suburb of Bournebridge in the making. Used as she was to ancient cottages with many drawbacks, she was moved to mirth by the work of the jerry-builder and told herself they were very Biblical sort of men, since they certainly did not believe that here we had any continuing city. She had to smile, too, at the young husbands at work in their gardens about the size of a pocket-handkerchief. A few more years and the stomachs of most would spread and they would tell the missus to send for the jobbing gardener when the front patch needed tidying and be solemn with her about giving another man a job.

But along the road to Saxstey were gardens for which Arabella had a real respect and even love. She would lean over the fence and learn off the different crops and keep a record of their progress in her mind, just as if she were visiting her own gardens. No. She did not want to be at work amongst the flowers and vegetables again. She wasn't yet ready to revive the past.

She wasn't the woman she had been. Once on a time she could have laughed at the effort in this laundry work. But her strength had been sucked out of her in the last days at Dodnash, and after a day at the clothes she hadn't heart or energy to go gadding about. She went once to the pictures to see what the new invention was like. She found it interesting, but she was too much of an old music-hall woman to enjoy a show without flesh and

blood in it. There was nothing to really warm your heart in pictures. She felt entitled to go to the music-hall; she was only responsible to George at the very end. But an austerity from her forefathers kept her from her greatest relaxation. She decided to keep her life as severe as George's in prison; to pay level with him all the time.

She went to no Church or Chapel. She wanted to hear no doctrines now that she had defended herself against her own conscience and against Sulyer.

The sickness of soul that had possessed her during the last days at Dodnash died. A new eagerness for life sprouted in her. And the certain knowledge that her life would be always maimed, sprouted at the same time. She could do her day's work and keep herself in food and clothes and have her own thoughts about little things. But she had no children, nor books nor creed. She was a worker for and with a man—with George Cole. He was gone; never to be had again. She would have cast him off herself, if he had not done so. He had meant misery and death. Yes, though no other man would ever take hold of her mind as George had done, he had meant misery and death. And she could not face a second dose of it.

She must be like many of the daughters of Eve. She must live a half-life and make it serve. She would find a better job than laundrying in time; perhaps gardening again. That would fill her thoughts pretty well. And what part of her was not filled must be left empty; it would go dead like a

branch struck by lightning. And that was all there was to it.

Almost as soon as she had fumbled through to a rough scheme of rebuilding her life, Sulyer attempted to ruin it. He wrote from Dodnash Hall that she was to give notice at the laundry and be at the Hall by midday on the first day of the new trial.

She knew what he meant. He wanted his hand on her if George were found guilty. That was his first object.

Then, if George were set free and went to the Hall before he set forth on his future life, he and Sulyer would have another shot at making her confess and pay the penalty. She knew their ideas. If she were still obstinate,—as she would be,—they would pack her off to some place beyond the sea so that the scandal should never rise up against Chapel in the time to come. That was Sulyer's second object.

He might command her when he had the power to command and not before. He knew nothing. And she was no longer in the state when insinuations could tear her to pieces. She could look after the first object and save George without any help from William Sulyer. She was not to be led to the police. And as for the second object, she had done with the past. She owed George Cole only one thing,—the half of their savings and the half of the money for the garden and stock.

She wrote to Sulyer that she would be at Grennis

whenever he wanted to speak to her, as she had promised. And as soon as she heard that George was released she would tell the Bank to send him the money due to him.

Sulyer wrote back to allow her to stay at Grennis for the meantime. But on no account was she to appear at King's West when the trial came on. She would be told of George's movements after his release, and she would help most to his release by her absence. If she did appear, she might find things very unpleasant for her.

She told herself she did not want to go all the way to King's West to see a stranger tried for murder. Though that was only partially true. But she was puzzled by Sulyer's haughty tone and by his request. How could her absence from the trial help George?

The answer shot into her mind from the sauce she had had from the young woman on her first day at the laundry. The gossip of Edie Board had spread all over the county, and if Arabella Cole did not turn up at her husband's trial, it would be said that she was afraid of something definite coming out against her and of being arrested on the spot. And, on the other hand, it would be on everybody's tongue that George was quite innocent.

She reminded herself that she had always been ready to help George, and was still ready to help him to a certain extent, though they had parted for good and all. She would not go, though she

would have liked to show the whole world she was unafraid.

And her heart told her that she was afraid. It had cost her a lot to win back to half a life. And half a life was better than none; too dear to risk for nothing.

CHAPTER XXVI

She read all the reports of the trial in the newspapers, and to her way of thinking it was just the high-minded, silly business you might expect from men. The Judge and his men went walking to the Church and the parson preached and honest folk prayed,—and Gossip settled the whole thing.

At the first inquiry whether George Cole should be killed by the world or not, lawyers had investigated for days and days, and a Judge and ten men had decided that George ought to be done away with. Now Gossip had come along, the second inquiry into the same affair was over within three days. George's lawyer stated at the beginning that the unhappy man ought never to have been kept in prison for a second hearing, by way of reminding the jury they had got to weigh all the gossip they had heard. And the public agreed with the lawyer so loudly that the Judge had to threaten to clear the Court. But the Judge was helpless. Gossip made the Judge administer the Law in accordance with the real Truth,—as far as George was concerned.

George's lawyer made a great to-do with a map of Dodnash and showed how Cissie could have gone anywhere on the fatal night. People said to one another that he was a fabulously clever lawyer

and that he was going to have one of the best paid jobs in the kingdom before long. Yes, he was to have ten thousand a year for life because Edie Board was born with a long tongue and a restless nature. Holank would not get quite so much, as he was only a country-town lawyer. He would only be able to buy a small mansion and hunt three days a week.

Not one satisfied feeling stirred in Arabella over the frustration of Cissie Rouse's ghost nor over the successful purging of her house. She had lost her house, lost her man, lost half her life. All her old hot ideas were like the idle fancies of a child.

The police called on her again and said she was to speak out now that her husband was a free man. She could see they were fed up with their own mistake, though angry enough to be eager to mend it. She asked them what they wanted her to say. Oh, yes; she admitted she was out of doors on the fatal night. There were not many nights of the year when she was not out of doors after dark, as the same neighbour might have told the police if they had asked. Yes, she remembered that night, for a very good reason. But apart from that, it grew warmish after the night had set in and she had to open her garden frames an inch or two.

While she was answering the police, she suddenly felt like a ghost wandering amongst live people. Then she felt she was still a ghost, but was now being chased by live people who did not know she was nothing but a shadow. It was uncanny.

And after the police had gone away, more or less admitting that their inquiry was at an end, she still felt queer. It was as though the uniformed ones had put their fists through a thin veil in front of a mirror and split it down enough for her to see herself as she really was. She had deluded herself; thought she was half-alive. And she was only a spirit, a wandering spirit.

She struggled against this unnatural and profound way of regarding herself, but her experiences had bitten too deeply and their total effect was not to be easily removed. She caught the other women of the laundry looking at her in a peculiar way and knew that her thoughts were beginning to alter her expression and her whole bearing.

Mr. Sulyer sent word that George would be at Dodnash Hall for about a month, as he was poorly after all he had been through. However, he would soon pick up and then go abroad alone. Mr. Sulyer added that the separation had his entire approval. She smiled and said to herself that the old gentleman was a bit late in the day with his approvals. She went to the Bank and asked the clerk behind the counter to send half her money to George and got back to her lodgings with the feeling that her married life was at last finished and done with.

George acknowledged the money as if it had been tuppence-ha'penny. His writing went straight on to say she must come back to him and go abroad with him.

Her hands trembled as she tore up the letter. It

was a shock, and not a shock. He had told her she was in darkness and treated her very faithfully as such. But when it came to the point, the expected happened, and he durst not stir an inch without her. All very fine for him to confess that he had been mistaken when he had condemned her and cast her off. All very well for him to admit that she was entitled to her own way of self-purification. She knew that without his approval. He might have known it before he threw her into agony and shame. No, she had had enough of him and his wandering, torturing, spirit-murdering mind. No second dose of him for her.

She did not trouble to answer the letter. Yet she had to admit to herself that George's demand had a strange and welcome effect. The ghost-feeling faded. After all, if a man wanted you, you couldn't be much of a shadow. And, besides, warmth seemed to come into her bones and flesh: a quiet, healing warmth.

She treated the two next letters in the same way: tore them up and kept mum. She felt guilty to behave in that manner towards anyone who had stood the racket twice on her account, but writing was dangerous. Once she started to argue, she was done. George would run round her points as he had run round his own convictions.

At last George stated that his time in England was up and that he was coming to Grennis to fetch her, though it meant a big quarrel with Sulyer. Her common sense stood up. She called herself all

manner of names for allowing things to drift. George must not quarrel with Sulyer. It was in the papers that the passage money had been paid and that George had actually gone abroad. But the papers said what they liked. Sulyer was quite capable of taking the emigration ticket away from George, and the rest of the subscription money as well, if he thought George intended to pass the rest of his days with an evil woman. She was certainly an evil woman in Sulyer's eyes, but he would welcome her at Dodnash Hall if she helped him to get George off alone.

She went to the laundry office and asked for time off on the morrow and promised to work late when she got back. So the manageress said it would be all right.

She took the tram at about ten o'clock after an early spell of work and when she got out at the 'Eagle' terminus, she was two miles on her way to the Hall. She had her umbrella, but it was a nice May morning with never a look of rain. Her mind was all sixes and sevens; all swayed by her strong feelings for George. She had to conjure up the past with all its sorrow before she felt in the right mood to tackle him.

Still, past or no past, it was no use pretending a good May morning did not lift your heart. No doubt, when she was at her worst in the old days, the land and the sky, the sun and the air had fed her though she had been too bowed down to notice their feeding. She looked about with greedy eyes

as she walked. It was wonderful how indoor work and fixed hours sharpened your sense for the outside world. Everything was brown and green and hundreds of shades of brown and green. And who would have thought she could almost cry to see the white scut of a rabbit, as the little thing lolloped over a field she had once known as well as the palm of her hand!

Starvation was the beginning of life, said her old Dad. He knew it might just as likely be the beginning of death, but the Scotch in him made him keep half his thought to himself. Poor old Dad! She wondered who was throwing flower-pots at him now; somebody who threw them with meaning, she hoped, or the flavour would be out of things for him.

Her mind grew full of the knowledge that she would soon be able to take up gardening again. Gardening had never harmed her, only the husband with the garden. And that was one of the things she had to tell George.

She went round to the kitchen door at Dodnash Hall and found Miss Sulyer helping the cook with the dinner. Both women looked her up and down in a very old-fashioned way until she explained that she had come to put a bit of sense into George Cole's head. Miss Sulyer did not trust her even then, but George must have been giving a lot of trouble, and William Sulyer as well, because the good lady swallowed her dislike and said Arabella

had better go straight along the passage to the dining-room and knock.

Well, she went along the passage and heard Sulyer's voice rap out: "You'll go alone." He was so distinct that it was difficult to believe the door was shut.

She stood on tip-toe to hear what George would answer, but nothing came. Then she knocked and was told to come in. As soon as she obeyed and before she had time to look round the room, Sulyer told her she was not wanted and would be wise to go away while she was still free.

His remarks affected her as they had always; they made her put her ears back and feel inclined to jib like ten mules. She looked to George. He was in a chair, gaping at her as if he could not believe his eyes. He was not looking too well; hollow-faced and grey. He was in great trouble of mind, but he had fight in him, and as soon as he realized she was not abashed by Sulyer he got up and came to her. "Bella!" His worries flew off like frightened birds. "You've come!"

"What's the trouble, George?" she asked, because although he had to be packed off alone there was no call for anybody to whip him first.

George explained that Sulyer had said now he was a free man, the case was still open. And George could be re-examined as a possible witness and the truth dug out of him: all he knew about the fatal night. George was terrified the authorities would

find out about the wet stockings and so he had agreed to go abroad without Arabella.

"So you're juggling with the Law?" she asked Sulyer. He did not answer her jeer, and she felt a cold sweat come on her. Men always did juggle with the Law and made its blindness serve their turn. Then she grew hot; she had paid enough on account of a woman who had neither sense nor scruple. She told both the men they could have saved all their noise. She had been through Hell once for George Cole. And she was not going there again, with him or for him. She was done with him. And that was all she had come to say.

Sulyer's face lit up and he said she was a sensible woman. George's face lit up as well,—but for a different reason. He praised her for going all the way to Hell. He turned to Sulyer and said she was stronger than Sulyer and dared go all the way to Hell without sheltering behind a creed or a law. And though the old man scowled, George declared she was entitled to return again to life and was entitled to go with him.

It was much the same as he had written to her, but now he said it in front of her, she realized it was a genuine belief in him. If she had not suffered and faced her own soul, he would not have asked her to come back to him. She must give him that much credit. He had read her face when he saw her in prison and in the Court at the first Assizes and had learned a new truth from it.

But at the same time he was not in accord with

her new desires. He was less than ever of a gardener. He was now unalterably Spouting Cole, the mind-searcher.

She heard Sulyer going on against George's point of view. He said he would not have a mockery of his own religion in his house. Christ had died once for all and nobody could save their own souls apart from Him. A woman who had sinned against society must pay her debt to society.

George answered manfully, but she had not come to listen to their talk. She was off to her own healthy life; to work that warmed the body and mind alike. She stepped to the door and said 'Good morning' and walked out. She was satisfied to hear the silence that came on the two men.

CHAPTER XXVII

She stopped in the hall near the mackintoshes belonging to Mr. Sulyer and to Miss Sulyer. She was troubled. She had done wrong against herself and against everybody by leaving George. She had got into such a habit of defending herself that she was allowing men and men's talk to irritate her and put her on the wrong road.

She turned round and went back into the dining-room. Sulyer had his hand on George's shoulder as if he had checked him from going after her. George was not rebelling against the hand because he was mastered by Sulyer's knowledge of the law. She herself was terrified of it, but she was not going to show it. Perhaps she did show a little fear in her face, because Sulyer dropped his hand from George and started towards her.

But she took the word and her voice seemed to her loud enough to be heard as far as Bournebridge: "I've been scared, George Cole. Scared to death of the past; scared by all I've done and suffered; scared by all you've done and by all you are. But I'm not now. I've come back. And if you want to come to Grennis with me,—and me to go where you like after that, I'm willing."

George did not start to her or make a fuss. He stood as easy as a man who has just dropped a

sack of wheat after carrying it a mile: "That's good, Bella," he said, and meant it. She was pleased he was so steady over it.

"You've thought what you are doing?" Sulyer asked her. He was threatening again. But she could tell it was not her crime alone that offended him now. But the fact that she had defeated him over George Cole, that she was going off with a man who accepted her point of view and not William Sulyer's.

She was too wary to challenge his power. There were deeper things to be weighed. He had got to understand her, as much as an iron-bound man could understand. "I don't mind being put to death," she assured Sulyer. "Not in one way, I don't. I thought I was fit for gardening again. So I am, up to a point. But I've been through too much. And as long as I live, I shall always feel I'm a ghost."

"That's what we all are. But it's wonderful; when the flesh is worn away enough for us to know it," George cried out.

She did not take any notice of George. "I like feeling a ghost so little, William Sulyer, I don't mind what you do to me. Not if it comes to the point."

The old man nodded. He saw she had paid something for taking the law into her own hands. But he was not going to give her George Cole and a share in the subscriptions for an innocent man. And he told her so.

"You're like me," she told him. "Or like I was, when I went out just now. You're under the power of the past; drawing good lessons from it for the future."

"Yes," he admitted.

"Well, there's no good lessons to be drawn," she said. "Not one. The past has planted itself in us and it'll work without our prying and prodding. We have got George Cole to consider. For some reason or other, he's important to you and me. By nature."

"He's not so important as right and wrong," Sulyer thundered out.

"Right and wrong towards him is important," answered Arabella. "And that's what your law and creed has made you forget. George is done for as a preacher. Done for as a speaker in England."

"I should think so!" Sulyer did not want reminding of George's misdeeds.

"But he's got the gift of the gab." George smiled when Arabella said that and meant he was going to use his gift somewhere and somehow. So she warned Sulyer that there were still Cissie Rouses in the world; rogues in Africa and Asia who would make use of George if she were not at hand to guard him.

"Let him be used by rogues. He will learn sense, all the quicker." Sulyer tried to scorn her argument, but he was not sure of himself. He did not like the way George had stepped across the Law to get back to her. So Sulyer burst out again in a

second: "I've told him to get a job on a farm. He has the subscription money and your savings. That will keep him till he finds something."

"Will it?" Arabella questioned desperately. "George's money will last him till the first cadger tells his tale of woe." Sulyer looked to George for a word of contradiction, but George was miles away in thought. Practical arrangements never interested him. "Yes," Arabella emphasized. "Look at him. He'll work on a farm. For a week. What employer is going to let him stand and dream in the field, as I used to let him stand and dream? He'll be sacked from everywhere. He will end in the ditch. Or in the hands of rogues. And you can take your choice of me or the ditch or the rogues for him."

"Oh!" Sulyer grunted. He did not like common sense when it ran against his convictions. "I suppose he might meet some good people, just as he might meet rogues. But the good people would want to know his past." Sulyer wagged his head from side to side.

"Of course," said Arabella. "I ask you. Is he any more to be left alone than a child? Isn't that why I can't leave him? That alone?"

Sulyer growled to himself and then he told George he would send the box of clothes to Dodnash station cloak-room, to be called for.

George spoke his thoughts and they surprised her as much as they did Sulyer. "I've been thinking about Cain and Abel. It was a bad deed of passion.

But did you ever picture Cain alone in a great desert and nothing but God all over and around him? It's a wonderful picture. No law, no creed, no anything. Just Cain and God. That's how life ought to be now. The soul ought to be served; nothing else." George stuck his hand out while he was talking.

"Good day," said Sulyer. He took no notice of the hand.

George stared; he could not believe that the old man meant to hurt him. Then he realized that he was being condemned for looking at things in his own way, so he drew himself up and turned to Arabella and told her he must fetch his small parcel from the bedroom before he met her in the back-yard. Then he walked out of the dining-room, and that was the last that Sulyer saw of him.

The old man was angry and told Arabella she was a bad lot. But as she told him, George might be standing in much the same shoes that Cain stood in, but they were his own shoes and none of William Sulyer's.

He told her to clear out and meet George. The future still had a thing or two to teach them.

And she answered she was content to have it so.